MEDITATIONS ON THE SUFFERINGS OF JESUS CHRIST

REV. F. DA PERINALDO, O. S. F.

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MEDITATIONS

ON THE

SUFFERINGS OF JESUS CHRIST.

Translated from the Italian

OF

REV. F. FRANCIS DA PERINALDO, O.S.F.,

By a Member of the Same Order.

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✠ Michael Augustine,

Archbishop of New York.

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TO

THE GREAT AND BELOVED BISHOP OF THE WEST,

THE STANCH DEFENDER OF THE FAITH,

THE TENDER FATHER OF THE POOR,

THE ZEALOUS APOSTLE OF TEMPERANCE,

THE EARNEST ADVOCATE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION,

THE VIGILANT AND FAITHFUL SHEPHERD OF HIS FLOCK,

RT. REV. JOHN IRELAND, D.D.,

Bishop of St. Paul,

THE TRANSLATOR HUMBLY DEDICATES THIS LITTLE WORK, THAT, BEARING THE IMPRESS OF HIS APPROBATION AND RESTING UNDER THE SHADOW OF HIS ILLUSTRIOUS NAME, IT MAY MERIT A CONSIDERATION WHICH IT MIGHT NOT OTHERWISE CLAIM.

NOTRE DAME DE LOURDES ACADEMY,
ROCHESTER, MINNESOTA,
Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, 1885.

PREFACE.

IT is customary among Catholics to prepare for the celebration of the principal festivals of the year by certain pious exercises, such as fasts, novenas, triduums, and meditations on the divine mysteries; also by reading the lives of the saints and striving to imitate their virtues, mortifications, and heroic actions. In this manner the faithful prepare to solemnize the feasts of Christmas, Pentecost, and Corpus Christi; of the Immaculate Conception, Nativity, and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin; of All Saints, and of those saints for whom they have a particular devotion. They not only devote days and weeks to preparing themselves for the worthy observance of those feasts which they purpose to celebrate with special piety, but they also consecrate whole months to the honor of the objects of their particular devotion. For instance, the month of May is dedicated to the celebration of the glories and triumphs of the Virgin Mother of Jesus Christ; the month of June to the commemoration of the Most Sacred Heart of our Holy Redeemer; and in recent times the whole of November, particularly in Catholic Spain and the Southern Republics, has been devoted to the souls in purgatory.

Now, if the faithful so commendably dispose themselves to celebrate those feasts which may be considered

secondary ones, why should we not do as much, and even more, for Easter, which is the feast of feasts? I say Easter, because on that day our Holy Redeemer triumphed over the world, over death, and over hell, achieving this threefold victory by His glorious resurrection, and sealing, as it were, the fulfilment of that grand and memorable sacrifice which released us from the bondage of sin and the tyranny of hell, made us heirs of heaven, and declared us adopted children of God.

The most practical way of preparing ourselves for the celebration of Easter is not alone by prayer, penance, mortification, and retirement,—acts peculiar to the Lenten season,—but also by meditating on the passion of Jesus Christ. Though this is a devotion adapted to all seasons, it is particularly suited to Lent, because our holy Mother the Church has consecrated this time to the commemoration of the sufferings of the Man-God.

My object in preparing this work was to provide a spiritual guide for secular persons; and, knowing from experience how difficult it is for them, when engaged in temporal affairs, to apply their thoughts to serious and merely abstract ideas, I thought it proper to render the consideration of the sufferings of Jesus historical, moral, and, as far as possible, local. But the passion of our Lord is of such a nature, that in order to derive profit from the history of it, it is not sufficient to read it as we read the lives of the saints and other histories: it requires meditation. It is true that the word "meditation" dismays, at first, persons who are not accustomed to such spiritual entertainment, and sometimes even those who frequently make pious reflections. For such persons I have obviated all cause of alarm by reducing the present considerations to simple spiritual reading, which will

yield the fruits of meditation by mere perusal. But I request that these considerations be not read in haste nor many at a time, but slowly and with reflection, one every day, either in the morning during Mass, or in the evening before retiring. For those persons consecrated to God in a special manner, and who are accustomed to meditate, I have divided each consideration into two parts, which will furnish matter for morning and evening meditation during the Lenten season.

Finally, it is my duty to declare that if, in the course of this little work, I have tried to excite the devotion of the faithful by quoting facts and traditions upon the authenticity of which our holy Mother the Church has not decided, I do not intend to attribute to them any other authority than that of the pious authors from whom I obtained them.

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INTRODUCTION.

"O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to My sorrow."—*Lamentations* i. 12.

THESE mournful accents placed by Jeremias in the mouth of the afflicted daughter of Sion may well be referred to Jesus Christ suspended between heaven and earth; and yet, oh senselessness! "the just perisheth," says Isaias the prophet, "and no man layeth it to heart." "Every creature," says St. Jerome, "commiserates the death of Jesus Christ: the sun is obscured, the earth trembles, the rocks are split, the vale of the temple is rent, the sepulchres are opened, and man alone for whom Jesus died remains insensible; and man does not pity his Redeemer." St. Augustine thus addresses man: "Jesus Christ came to suffer; He came to die, to be spat upon, and, finally, to be crucified on that infamous gibbet, the cross; He patiently endured all these pains, all these sufferings, for you, and will you not suffer something for Him?"

Cardinal Bellarmine seeks to know why we are scarcely willing to suffer for love of God even what is strictly necessary for our salvation, since the Eternal Son of God, who could have redeemed us by shedding a single drop of His precious blood, willingly endured unspeakable sufferings and poured out all His blood for love of us. The venerable author discovers that it is because we do not attentively meditate on the passion of Jesus Christ, and on the great love He showed for us by dying on the

cross. The prophet Jeremias assigns the same reason when he says, "With desolation is all the land made desolate: because there is none that considereth in the heart" (Jerem. xii. 11). And indeed if all would reflect upon how much our beloved Redeemer suffered for us, certainly they would not offend Him by even a venial sin, and they would be as ardent with divine love as the seraphim in heaven. The Doctor of Grace recommends as most beneficial the daily meditation on the passion, asserting that a tear shed in memory of the sufferings of Christ is more meritorious before God than a life-long fast. "The wounds of Jesus," says the same holy Father, "are full of mercy, full of sweetness and charity. As for me, in all my adversities I have not found a more powerful remedy than meditation on the sacred wounds of my holy Redeemer; in those wounds I repose calmly. When some foul thought disturbs my mind, I have recourse to the wounds of my Jesus; when my flesh rebels against me, I remain victorious with the memory of the wounds of my Saviour; when the common enemy lays snares against me, I have recourse to the mercy of my Holy Redeemer, and the infernal enemy flies from me; when the ardor of concupiscence goads and excites my passions, I remember the passion of Jesus, and they return at once to their former calm. In a word, there is nothing in the world, though bitter as death itself, which with the memory of the sufferings of Jesus will not become sweetened." St. Gregory the Great says that "where the thought of the death of Jesus reigns, there concupiscence of the flesh cannot reign." St. Isidore affirms that if we consider the passion of our Redeemer, there is no suffering which we may not only bear with patience and resignation, but also with exquisite pleasure and joy.

"Truly," asks St. Bernard, "who is there so irreligious as not to become contrite at the consideration of the excruciating sufferings of Jesus Christ? Who is there so proud as not to become humble? so irascible and vindictive as not to forgive? so attached to the honors and riches of the world as not to despise them? so malicious and sinful as not to repent? Ah! even this very moment the remembrance of the sufferings of Jesus moves the hardest hearts, as one day His painful death moved the earth and split the rocks."

The same writer, addressing himself to our Lord, says: "Thy passion, O Lord, is the last refuge of a miserable sinner; it is a powerful remedy for all the infirmities of the soul; it supplies wisdom, justice, and sanctity. When virtue fails me, when my feeble strength abandons me, I am not disturbed; I do not distrust, but I have recourse to the wholesome chalice of Thy passion. I know that I have no merits before Thee, but I know that Thy merits are infinite, as is also the treasure of Thy mercy. I shelter myself meanwhile in the bowels of Thy mercy, and therein I taste how sweet is the Lord."

"The passion of our Lord," a devout author writes, "supports heaven and earth and vanquishes hell. By the passion the angels are confirmed, mankind is redeemed, the enemies are conquered." Another pious author says that "the passion of Jesus Christ restored glory to God, repaired the ruin of the angels, crowded heaven with citizens, merited grace for man, acquired glory for the just, condemned sin and death, disarmed the devil of his power, and despoiled hell of its prisoners." In a word, the passion of Jesus is so meritorious that God alone can explain its excellence; but we may experience the efficacy of its merits by a daily meditation upon it.

"O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet: blessed is the man that hopeth in Him" (Psalms xxxiii. 9).

Father Louis della Palma says that meditation on the passion of our Lord is suitable for all persons and all states of life. It will recall the sinner from his evil course, raise the falling from the pit of vice, strengthen the feeble in the path of virtue, quicken the persevering in the way to perfection, stimulate the love of the holy soul. All the glorious examples of virtue which Jesus gave us during His life shine out most resplendently in His passion.

St. Bonaventure, who wrote admirably on the passion and acquired his seraphic doctrine from the crucifix, says that if we wish to advance in perfection we should meditate every day on the sufferings of Jesus Christ, because such a practice is a powerful means of sanctifying our souls. It will free us from all evil, procure us every good, enrich us with the grace of God in this world, and merit for us eternal life in the next. "Yes," says St. Leo the Great, "meditation on the sufferings of Jesus will merit for you life everlasting; because where the participation of the sufferings is, there is also a certain expectation of the promised beatitude."

What devotion can there be more excellent, more efficacious, and more useful than this? Who would refuse to spend half an hour a day in this pious exercise which has always been the delight of the saints? How many nights did not our seraphic Father St. Francis pass in contemplating the sufferings of his beloved Jesus, and with how many graces was he not favored in return? Let us, therefore, imitate this seraph of love, and like him we shall derive great joys and consolations in this life, and also in the next.

MEDITATIONS

ON

THE SUFFERINGS OF JESUS CHRIST.

CONSIDERATION I.

Jesus Christ predicts His Passion to His Apostles.

"And Jesus going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples apart, and said to them: Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man shall be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death."—*St. Matt.* xx. 17, 18.

First Point.

THE time determined from all eternity for the Redemption of mankind was fast approaching, and Jesus, taking a last leave of the plains of Galilee, went to Jericho, the city of palms, where He remained for some time. He was followed by a great multitude of people of every condition, who were attracted no less by His sanctity than by His divine doctrine. Among them were His Virgin Mother, His apostles, a great number of disciples, and the holy women who accompanied Him to Calvary. As the feast of the Pasch drew near, Jesus passed on to Jerusalem, there to celebrate that solemnity with the people. His joy on this occasion was so great,

and beamed so resplendently from His countenance, that the mother of James and John believed that the time had come for His temporal kingdom, and besought Him to let her two children sit one on the right and the other on the left of His throne.

Far different indeed was the cause of the joy which filled His Sacred Heart: He was about to immolate Himself upon the cross to appease His Eternal Father for our sins, and for this reason He was happy. But fearing that His passion might be an occasion of scandal to His apostles, He called them apart and told them of it thus: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man shall be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death." This was equivalent to saying: "Behold, my dear disciples, we go up to Jerusalem, but I shall not return with you to Galilee. My enemies who have long been trying to apprehend Me will now accomplish their designs, and I shall be delivered as a malefactor into the hands of the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees, who will condemn Me to a most disgraceful death. I shall then be given over to the gentiles, who will mock Me, scourge Me, crown Me with thorns, and finally crucify Me between two thieves. Be not scandalized at seeing Me subjected to such indignities; for as I have power to foresee them, so have I also power to avoid them: but I know that they are necessary to the eternal salvation of mankind, and also to My glory; therefore I go joyfully to meet them. You have now been forewarned of My ignominious death, and you know of My glorious resurrection; and when these things come to pass they should confirm your faith in Me, because I had predicted them to you."

Our Divine Redeemer had often before spoken of His

future passion, always in terms which betrayed the yearnings of His loving heart for its accomplishment. On several occasions He had mentioned it to His holy Virgin Mother, and it had frequently been the subject of His conversation with His apostles and disciples; and the Gospel tells us that during His glorious transfiguration on Mount Thabor in the presence of Peter, James, and John, Moses and Elias were talking with Him, "and they spoke of His decease that He should accomplish in Jerusalem" (St. Luke ix. 31). There seemed to be nothing dearer to Him than His much-desired passion. Speaking to His disciples He said, "I have a baptism, wherewith I am to be baptized: and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!" On the night of His last supper, unable longer to conceal His joy at the approach of His bitter passion, He manifested it to His apostles, saying: "With desire I have desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer" (St. Luke xxii. 15). Again He displayed this ardent desire when, turning to Judas who had already betrayed Him, He said, "Since thou hast determined to deliver Me into the hands of My enemies, delay no longer; do it quickly."

Oh, when we consider how the Eternal Son of God longed to die upon the cross for our redemption, how great appears our ingratitude in refusing to suffer anything for His love! Jesus went to meet His ignominious death with pleasure; we bear with murmuring and impatience even those little adversities which are unavoidable in our life. Ah! ought we not to be ashamed of our ingratitude towards our loving and merciful Redeemer? Let us resolve from this very moment to bear with patience and resignation all the crosses and humiliations which it may please God to send us.

Second Point.

The Evangelist remarks the eagerness with which our Lord undertook His last journey to Jerusalem: "And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem: and Jesus went before them, and they were astonished: and following were afraid" (St. Mark x. 32). An observer would have said that Jesus was going up to the holy city, not to be crucified as a malefactor, but to be crowned king. "Let those be ashamed," says Venerable Bede, "who think that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ feared death. He foresaw all the snares which His enemies laid against Him, yet He did not avoid them. He foresaw all the horrors of His bitter passion, yet He did not become terrified, neither did He flee, but went spontaneously to encounter death, though all dissuaded Him." This internal and external joy of our Saviour proceeded from His divinity more than from His humanity: His divine love for man was so intense, and His merciful desire of redeeming him so great, that they fortified His humanity against all fear of the torments, tortures, and slaughter to which it would soon be subjected. Still His Sacred Heart must have been immersed in the profoundest affliction; for, though His humanity, strengthened by His divinity, shrank not from the approaching passion, yet it keenly anticipated all the horrors which accompanied that passion. In fact, we read that in the Garden of Olives our Lord was assailed by such agonizing grief that He sweat blood. In this case His divinity, instead of relieving His anguish, increased it, by displaying before His mind in all their hideous enormity the ignominies to which He would be subjected.

In order to form an idea of our Saviour's emotions on

leaving Galilee, let us imagine Him to be a person like ourselves, feeling such pangs as we suffer in quitting country, riches, honors, parents, and relatives.

With what tender affection does not a man take a last farewell of his native land, his parents, and his friends, when about to enter upon a long and dangerous journey from which he fears he may not return! The place which he is about to abandon never appeared so beautiful, the loved ones with whom he parts never seemed so dear; all the diversions of his childhood, all the pleasures of his youth, all the hopes of his past life are fondly and sadly recollected.

Let us refer these same emotions to the loving and sensitive heart of Jesus. How affectionately did He not bid farewell to Nazareth where He had passed His youth; to Capharnaum which He had chosen as the centre of His heavenly mission; to Cana of Galilee where He had performed His first miracle; to Lake Tiberias across which He had often sailed with His disciples; to Mount Thabor where He had been transfigured; to the river Jordan where He had been baptized by His precursor; to Naim where He had wrought many wonders,—in a word, to all those places which had witnessed His childhood, His youth, His preaching, His prodigies, His prayers, His penances, and His fasts! We know from the Gospel that after His resurrection He returned to visit them again: "And behold He will go before you into Galilee: there you shall see Him" (St. Matt. xxviii. 7).

Let us imagine that our Lord as He journeyed along gazed affectionately on the mountains, streams, and other familiar objects by the way, and considering that it was the last time that He should pass as a mortal man through that beautiful region which awakened in Him the fondest

memories, He sought, as it were, to divide His grief with His beloved apostles, saying: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man shall be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death."

If Jesus was so grieved at leaving those delightful places, what must have been His feelings at parting from His apostles and disciples, and above all from His most loving Mother! Oh! it is impossible to give expression to such grief. Let us meditate upon this first step of our Saviour's passion; and if we are not able to repay Him for His love, let us at least pity Him in His affliction.

CONSIDERATION II.

Jesus Christ weeps over Jerusalem.

"And when He drew near, seeing the city, He wept over it."
St. Luke xix. 41.

FIRST POINT.

OUR Lord rested for a time at Jericho, after which He continued His journey towards Jerusalem, and on the eve of the Sabbath arrived at Bethania, a small suburb about half a mile distant from the city. Here He passed the Sabbath at the house of Mary Magdalene and Martha, where He was accustomed to stop with His disciples whenever He went from Galilee to Judea. The day following, being the fifth day before the Passover, was the occasion on which the Jews, according to the Mosaic law, brought the Paschal lambs into the city amid great pomp and rejoicing. Jesus, therefore, who was the true Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world, and the spotless Victim whose sacrifice on the altar of the cross was to secure the redemption of mankind, thought it proper to enter Jerusalem also on that day with appropriate rejoicing. Accompanied by His apostles He left Bethania early on the morning of Palm-Sunday, and went in the direction of the steep Mount of Olives. Arriving at Bethphage, a small village situated on a declivity of that mountain, He chose two of His disciples and said to them: "Go into the village that is over against you, and immediately at your coming in thither, you shall find a

colt tied, upon which no man yet hath sat: loose him and bring him. And if any man shall say to you: What are you doing? say ye that the Lord hath need of him: and immediately he will let him come hither" (St. Mark xi. 2, 3). The disciples obeyed at once. "And going their way, they found the colt tied before the gate without, in the meeting of two ways: and they loose him. And some of them that stood there said to them: What do you loosing the colt? Who said to them as Jesus had commanded them, and they let him go with them. And they brought the colt to Jesus: and they lay their garments on him, and He sat upon him" (St. Mark xi. 4–7). Thus mounted, the Divine Master, surrounded by His disciples, rode in the direction of Jerusalem. Passing over Mount Olivet, He was about to descend towards the Vale of Josaphat, when He halted to gaze upon the scene which lay spread out before Him—at His feet the garden of Gethsemani, before Him Mount Calvary, and beyond the full prospect of the holy city with its triple walls and lofty towers. Instantly His loving soul was assailed by a mortal sadness, and He gave vent to His grief in a copious flood of tears. "And when He drew near, seeing the city, He wept over it" (St. Luke xix. 41). Our Lord wept, and wept bitterly, not over Himself, but over the blindness of the Jews, over the hardness of sinners, over the obstinacy of His own people, and over the unhappy fate of Jerusalem. In the bitterness of His grief, He addressed these affectionate words to the unhappy city: "If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace, but now they are hidden from thy eyes. For the days shall come upon thee: and thy enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round: and straiten thee on every side:

and beat thee flat to the ground, and thy children who are in thee, and they shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone: because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation" (St. Luke xix. 42–44).

With these and other loving expressions, our merciful Lord bewailed the future calamities which hovered over Jerusalem. But in weeping over His own people and their unhappy city, He also mourned over the ingratitude of the millions of Christians, whom He foresaw would reap no fruits from the Redemption because of their indifference to Heaven's call. Ah! let the tears of our loving Jesus move us to pity for our miserable state, and if in the past we have displeased His loving heart by our obstinacy in sin, let us endeavor for the future to please Him by our repentance.

Second Point.

The prophecy of Jesus Christ regarding the siege and total destruction of Jerusalem has been literally fulfilled. Thirty-seven years after the Redeemer's death, Titus, Emperor of the Romans, surrounded the deicide city with a strong intrenchment, and after five months of terrible fighting razed it to the ground, leaving not a stone upon a stone, and cleansed unhappy Jerusalem of all its iniquities by the slaughter of eleven hundred thousand of its inhabitants. The obstinate Jews have been since then without temple or altar, without sacrifice or priesthood, without king or country, exiled, dispersed all over the globe, despised by all, reputed as a vile race, bearing impressed on their pallid foreheads the indelible sign of the terrible deicide perpetrated by their fathers. In the awful fate of this nation we can recognize the vengeance

of God excited by the insolence of the ungrateful Jews in disregarding the visitation of His divine mercy.

We should now reflect on ourselves in order to derive profit from the misfortunes of others. Let us imagine that our merciful Lord, knowing us guilty of many sins and seeing the approaching punishments which menace us, looks upon us from heaven with commiseration, and speaks to our hearts, saying: Unhappy soul, you do not know the miserable state in which you are! If you could see the eternal punishment which awaits you unless you repent, you would make serious reflections. Your body which you indulge so much will soon be reduced to ashes; those persons whom you love so tenderly you shall soon leave forever. All will be separated from you but your good and evil works; these will accompany you. You believe that the time is not near, but it is fast approaching: hell is open beneath you; the sentence of death has already been issued, and on My will depends its execution. Every day, every moment, every hour, may be the last for you. How long, therefore, will you delay to do penance? How long will you still provoke My anger, tire My patience? How many inspirations did I not send you? how many graces did I not grant you? how many advices and good examples did you not receive? how many times have I not called upon you, and you failed to respond? You were deaf to My voice and dumb to My exhortations. Therefore, I weep over you, and over your unhappy state, and the punishments which menace you; and weeping, I invite you for the last time to repentance, that yours may not be the fate of Jerusalem,—obduracy, abandonment, and eternal perdition.

Thus our merciful Lord speaks to our souls; and how shall we respond? With ingratitude? Ah, no! let us

prostrate ourselves at His feet, beseeching Him to grant us a profound grief for our sins, a firm and strong resolution of nevermore offending Him, and an ardent desire of loving Him now and for eternity. Let us also earnestly ask Him for the grace of meditating on His sufferings, in order that, having them before our eyes, we may be encouraged to support our sufferings.

CONSIDERATION III.

Jesus triumphantly enters Jerusalem.

"Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh sitting on an ass's colt."—*St. John* xii. 15.

First Point.

"REJOICE greatly, O daughter of Sion, shout for joy, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King will come to thee, the Just and Saviour: He is poor, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zach. ix. 9). This was the prophecy of Zacharias concerning the triumphant entry of Jesus Christ into the holy city of Jerusalem: but the disciples did not comprehend the meaning of these things until after His resurrection, when they found that all that had been written of Him had been literally verified.

Let us now consider the sentiments of the disciples and the people on the day of Christ's triumph.

The fame of His miracle of raising Lazarus to life had reached the city, and the people were eager to see Him. Hearing of His approach, they went out to meet Him just as He was meekly descending Mount Olivet. Some carried branches of olive as a sign of peace, others bore palm as a symbol of triumph, others gathered flowers and strewed them on the way as a demonstration of honor, and some, finally, divested themselves of their robes and spread them on the ground to be trampled upon by

the beast on which Jesus was sitting. All unanimously hailed Him, and gave expression to their great joy by singing a hymn of glory, saying: "Happiness and joy to the son of David, praise and glory to the expected of nations, to the desire of the eternal hills, to the foretold by the prophets, to the Saviour of the world! Behold our King! behold our Messias, who comes to us meek and humble, sitting on a beast of burden! Blessed be the King who cometh in the name of the Lord, peace in heaven, and glory on high." Here followed the choir of Hebrew children who gave glory to God, and loosing their innocent tongues to sing, proclaimed Jesus the expected Messias, saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David, glory and triumph to our King!" In the midst of these hosannas and acclamations, all recollected the great miracles which He had performed, the wonderful cures which He had wrought, the sublime and divine doctrine which He preached, and the admirable and most holy life which He led, and they were obliged to recognize Him as the true Son of God: hence they paid Him the tribute of honor and adoration.

The apostles were overjoyed at this triumph of their Master, and thinking that the time had come for His promised kingdom which they supposed would be of this world, they united more closely around Him, and walked joyfully over that flower-strewn road in the midst of the hosannas of the people and the canticles of the children.

What a glorious day was not that for the apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ! What a joy for the holy city of Jerusalem! If only the memory of that triumphant entrance of our Lord into the Jewish capital so fills us with joy, what must have been the happiness of those who witnessed it? If language fails to describe the celebra-

tions which commemorate the victories of kings and princes of this world, it is certainly inadequate to describe this memorable triumph of the King of glory, the Lord of heaven and earth, and the long-desired Messias.

Let us, therefore, imagine that we see Jesus descending Mount Olivet, hailed by the joyful acclamations of the multitude, and uniting with them let us repeat in sentiments of adoration and homage: "*Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini, hosanna in excelsis!*"

Second Point.

We have learned from the first point of the sentiments of the disciples and the people; let us now consider those of Jesus. While the apostles and disciples, filled with enthusiasm by the joyful manifestations of the crowd, believed that their Blessed Master was going to be crowned king of Jerusalem, and that He would at once commence to exercise His royal power, Jesus, whose divine mind penetrated the future, was thinking of the spectacle that would be witnessed a few days hence on that very road now strewn with flowers, olive-branches, and palms: yet He did not ignore the inconstancy of the Jewish people.

His eyes were yet moist from the tears shed over Jerusalem; and, as He passed those places soon to be rendered memorable by His sufferings, He thought of those events of His passion which would transpire in each. At Gethsemani He foresaw the betrayal of Judas and the flight of His disciples; at the grotto He thought of His agony and bloody sweat; at the torrent of Cedron He foresaw His fall into its waters and the cruelties which would be inflicted on Him there by His barbarous executioners.

Hearing the joyful hosannas which resounded in the air, He considered that five days from then they would be exchanged for "Let Him be crucified, let Him be crucified!" Perhaps Jesus said to Himself: "This honor which the Jews now render will soon be turned into the grossest ignominies. To-day they proclaim Me their king, but this shall not pass before they will solemnly declare that they recognize no other king than Cæsar. To-day they meet Me with olive-branches, palms, and flowers, and in a few days they will crown Me with a crown of thorns, they will scourge Me tied to a column. To-day they spread their garments on the road, and on Friday they will strip Me of Mine, which they will divide among themselves. To-day they introduce Me into their city chanting hymns of glory, and in a few days they will banish Me from it amidst howls and brawlings. To-day they call Me blessed, and when I shall be hanging on the cross they will curse and blaspheme Me. What a terrible contradiction is this!"

With these thoughts He ascended Mount Moria, which is opposite Mount Olivet, and passing through the Golden Gate, triumphantly entered Jerusalem. But instead of proceeding to some grand banquet-hall, He went directly to the temple, where He found a number of people buying and selling goods. Full of zeal for the honor of His Father's house, He seized a scourge, and overthrowing stands and money-tables, drove the changers from the temple, saying in a severe tone, full of authority: "My house shall be called the house of prayer: but you have made it a den of thieves" (St. Matt. xxi. 13). He then began to instruct the multitude, teaching them reverence towards the house of God. In the evening, not finding any one to give Him hospitality, He returned with His

disciples to Bethania, where He was always welcomed by Mary Magdalene and Martha, sisters of Lazarus.

In this consideration we should reflect, first, upon the inconstancy of the Jews in proclaiming Jesus king and so soon afterward crying out against Him. From this we should learn never to rely on ourselves, never to take notice of our temporary fervor, and never to trust to our constancy; but, on the contrary, we should regard ourselves unworthy of the favors and graces of God, and attend to our eternal salvation with fear and trembling, as St. Paul teaches. Secondly, we should reflect upon the great respect and reverence which we should have for the house of God, remembering the severe punishments inflicted upon the desecrators of the temple. If Jesus, who was the very essence of goodness, so severely punished those who profaned the Jewish temple, which was only a figure of ours, how much more will He not punish those who desecrate our churches where He is really present in the Blessed Sacrament?

CONSIDERATION IV.

Jesus predicts His Bitter Passion to His Apostles for the Second Time.

"And it came to pass: when Jesus had ended all these words, He said to His disciples: You know that after two days shall be the Pasch, and the Son of man shall be delivered up to be crucified."—*St. Matt.* xxvi. 1, 2.

First Point.

THREE days after His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Jesus said to His disciples: "You know that after two days shall be the Pasch," and I repeat to you what I have already told you, that on this solemnity I shall be delivered into the hands of My enemies, to be scoffed at, despised, scourged, and finally crucified. But before predicting the day of His death, He spoke to them on the general judgment, saying that He would come again on earth, not as a man subject to infirmities, but in all His divine majesty, accompanied by a multitude of angels, and that He would gather together before Him in the Valley of Josaphat all the nations of the earth. He foretold that the good would be separated from the bad, the former to be admitted to the eternal joys of heaven, and the latter to be condemned to the everlasting pains of hell. He also predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, and the reprobation of the Jewish nation, and its dispersion all over the world. Then the Divine Master resumed His subject, asking His disciples if they remem-

bered that in two days the Pasch would be celebrated and that He would be the victim.

Father Louis Novarino remarks that after Jesus Christ had foretold that He would come again in all the majesty of His glory, He immediately added that the day of His death was fast approaching. This was for the purpose of making us understand the relation which exists between the mystery of the cross and that of glory; hence those wishing to enter the glory of heaven should not refuse to accept and bear the cross with patience and resignation. Moreover, the same author says that those who desire to avoid the punishments due to their sins and escape the wrath of God will find means for so doing in the meditation of Christ's passion. In fact, how can we more efficaciously satisfy the justice of the Eternal Father than by offering to Him all the sufferings of His Divine Son? And how can we more surely obtain the mercy of Jesus than by contemplating His sacred wounds and endeavoring to crucify our rebellious passions for His love?

A profound theologian, commenting on this evangelical passage, says that as soon as Jesus had finished speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, the general judgment, and the consummation of the world, He immediately announced His bitter passion and painful death, fixing exactly the day and the manner of its occurrence. It seemed almost incredible that in so short a time and on so solemn a festival such a crime would be perpetrated. But in only two days the Jews had found the traitor, agreed upon the manner of the betrayal, arrested Jesus, put Him in prison, gathered the council, examined His cause, condemned Him to death, presented Him to Pontius Pilate for the ratification of the sentence, and crucified Him

between two thieves. Who could have imagined that the Jews would commit so heinous a crime at the time of the great and joyful festival of Easter, which commemorated their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt? Yet our Lord frankly asserted that they would, saying: "You know that after two days shall be the Pasch, and the Son of man shall be delivered up to be crucified" (St. Matt. xxvi. 2).

Let us now consider the goodness of our Holy Redeemer in so admirably disposing His apostles for His future death: let us consider also their grief and consternation on hearing from the lips of their beloved Master that in two days He would be delivered up to be crucified. If we had been present at this touching discourse, what emotions would we not have felt? Let us excite in ourselves those same feelings by meditating on those words: "You know that after two days shall be the Pasch, and the Son of man shall be delivered up to be crucified."

Second Point.

Dionysius Carthusianus asks why our Lord predicted His passion to His disciples, and answers himself by saying that Jesus did so for three reasons: first, that it should not appear that He was arrested unawares, or condemned to death against His will; secondly, that He might fortify His disciples, and prepare them to suffer with patience and resignation; thirdly, that they might know that He went voluntarily to Jerusalem, though aware that He would be arrested and put to death.

Jesus did not ignore His enemies, and instead of avoiding them as He did on other occasions, He went among them that they might do to Him as they desired. St.

Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, says that Christ not only predicted but also specified the day on which His passion would occur, in order that all should know that nothing is hidden from Him, and that He went of His own free will to suffer death. He journeyed from Galilee to Judea to celebrate Easter, and on the eve of the same went from Bethania to Jerusalem to be crucified. Origen, commenting on the above-quoted passage of the holy Gospel, says that many were the motives which concurred to deliver Jesus to death, but not all proposed the same end: the ends differed according to the different emotions and passions. The Eternal Father delivered His only-begotten Son to death through His love and mercy for mankind; Judas betrayed His Divine Master through avarice; the priests condemned Him to death through envy, the scribes and Pharisees through malice. Satan instigated the enemies of Jesus to put Him to death, because he feared that the exemplary life and preaching of Jesus would save many souls from hell: the infernal enemy did not reflect that the death of the Messias could more easily free us than His preaching.

But for what reasons do we sometimes deliver Him again to death by committing sin? Alas! our motives for doing so are often less weighty than those of Lucifer,—perhaps to satisfy a sinful passion or to revenge ourselves. Yet faith teaches us that Christ Jesus died on account of our sins, and Holy Scripture says that those who grievously sin deliver Him up again to death as far as in them lies.

We believe these truths, yet we will not be guided by them. We offend God, as it were, by habit. We do not reflect on the evils we do to our souls which cost the Eternal Son of God all of His most precious blood. We

ought, therefore, from time to time, to meditate on these truths of our holy faith, and consider what a great evil we do every time we sin. We ought to call to mind frequently that Jesus is our God, our Redeemer, our Judge, our Benefactor. In order to do this let us accompany Him as He goes to offer Himself as a victim of expiation for our sins, and He will grant us the grace of true repentance.

CONSIDERATION V.

The Chief Priests and Ancients of the People consult how to apprehend Jesus and put Him to Death.

"Then were gathered together the chief priests and ancients of the people into the court of the high priest who was called Caiphas: And they consulted together that by subtilty they might apprehend Jesus and put Him to death."—*St. Matt.* xxvi. 3, 4.

First Point.

WHILE Jesus in the home of Mary Magdalene was speaking of His approaching passion, there assembled in the palace of Caiphas in Jerusalem a great council composed of the chief priests, the ancients of the people, and the Pharisees, bitter enemies of our Lord, who had gathered together in order to deliberate as to how they might apprehend Jesus by subtilty, and without trial condemn Him to death. On several previous occasions this council had assembled for the same purpose, but as the time for the solemn sacrifice had not yet arrived, all their perfidious designs were frustrated. In the southern part of Jerusalem may be seen a mount called the Mount of the Evil Council, where, as tradition relates, Caiphas had a summer residence to which he several times brought his wicked counsellors to treat in secret of this impious affair.

The immediate cause of the convention at the palace was the resurrection of Lazarus. St. John the Evangel-

ist says that this great miracle led many of the Jews to believe in the divinity of Jesus, some of whom going to the city related the event to the Pharisees, Christ's most bitter enemies. Upon hearing of such a miracle, any one of unbiassed opinion would have said: "If this Man performs prodigies and great miracles, it is a sign that He is from God. Let us, therefore, hear His doctrine, imitate His holy example, and embrace His new law." But as the enemies of Jesus were ruled by passion rather than conscience, they said to one another: "If we permit this man to preach and propagate His new doctrine among the people, the time will come when we will all believe in Him and become His followers. Then the Romans will come and conquer us, and overturn our seats, and destroy our prestige with the people, and become masters of ourselves and of our nation."

Caiphas, the high priest of that year, rose up in the midst of the assembly, and, overtaken by the spirit of God, prophesied, saying: "You know nothing, neither do you consider that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (St. John xi. 49, 50). From that moment they determined to put Jesus to death, not to save their nation, but to satisfy their envy and hatred. The Divine Master, knowing their design, avoided them as much as possible until His time had come.

Let us now consider how pernicious is the passion of envy. The holiest works, the most stupendous miracles, excite in the envious man only emotions of malice. While others are filled with admiration and esteem, he becomes sad and suspicious. Let us recommend ourselves to the God of mercy that He may preserve us from so terrible and pernicious a vice.

Second Point.

Easter was near at hand; and the Jews, knowing that Jesus was accustomed to celebrate it at Jerusalem, gathered again in secret against Him, and conspired to apprehend Him and condemn Him to death. All agreed to arrest Him by stratagem, because they feared that, should they attempt to take Him in public, He would evade them as He had previously done. Moreover, they were much perplexed about fixing the day for putting Him to death; for they said, "Not on the festival day, lest there should be a tumult among the people" (St. Mark xiv. 2). They had good reasons to fear the indignation of the people, because the Divine Master had never done evil to any one; on the contrary, He had benefited all, and was, consequently, very popular. Many had accepted His holy doctrine, and they would boldly defend Him against injustice.

Besides, as the feast of the Pasch was celebrated only in Jerusalem, there would assemble there people from Galilee, Samaria, Phœnicia, Idumea, Tragonidides, —in short, from all the Jewish tribes. Many were the blind whom He had illumined, the lame whom He had made to walk, the leprous whom He had cleansed, the sick whom He had cured, the hungry whom He had satisfied, the dead whom He had resuscitated; and it could not be doubted that among the crowds then gathering at the holy city there would be some of those favored ones who would surely defend their Benefactor. The scribes and Pharisees, therefore, greatly feared a popular revolt; hence they said, "Not on the festival day, lest there should be a tumult among the people;" let us wait until after the feast, when all shall have returned to their homes,

and then we will arrest Him and put Him to death. During this discussion, Judas the traitor entered, and volunteered to deliver his Divine Master into their power; immediately they changed their determination. We shall see in the following chapter how this betrayal was accomplished; for the present, let us consider with St. Thomas of Villanova the motives which induced the priests, the ancients of the people, the scribes and Pharisees, to condemn their Messias to death. The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together and said: "What do we, for this Man doth many miracles: here is His crime. What, therefore, shall we do?" O infamous! O perverse! Jesus must be recognized as the true Son of God; He must be venerated, He must be worshipped, He must be adored. "But if we adore Him," they answer, "all will believe in Him; and the Romans will come, they will banish us, and conquer and destroy our nation." But why do you fear this Man? What appearance of royalty do you discern in Him who is so poor and humble? And if He should be declared king of the Jews, fear not; for as He has power to perform miracles and prodigies, so also has He power to defend your nation against the Romans. His only crime is that He has performed miracles, that by His omnipotent power He has given sight to the blind, raised the dead to life. For this reason you should worship, serve, and love Him, instead of condemning Him. O unparalleled audacity! O unequalled blindness!

Let us now come to ourselves. What are the crimes of Jesus Christ, when we banish Him from our souls and allow the devil to take possession of them? Do His crimes perhaps consist in having created us out of nothing in preference to millions and millions of possible

beings who would probably have served Him more faithfully than we? in having called us to the bosom of our holy Mother the Catholic Church, while thousands and thousands are wandering in the midst of darkness? in having redeemed us from the slavery of sin and the tyranny of hell, by shedding the last drop of His most precious blood? in having preserved us from many diseases, persecutions, and misfortunes? in having enriched us with temporal and spiritual goods? in having sent us so many inspirations, granted us so many graces and favors? What merits had we in the sight of God to be so signally favored in preference to so many Turks, idolaters, heretics, schismatics, and sinners? Our answer shall be the second spiritual fruit of this consideration.

CONSIDERATION VI.

Judas sells his Divine Master for Thirty Pieces of Silver.

"Then went one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, to the chief priests: and he said to them: What will you give me, and I will deliver Him unto you? But they appointed him thirty pieces of silver."—*St. Matt.* xxvi. 14, 15.

First Point.

THE chief priests and the ancients were, meantime, assembled in council in the palace of Caiphas, when Judas Iscariot, the traitor, came among them; and, boldly and openly divulging his perfidious designs, exclaimed, "What will you give me, and I will deliver Him unto you?" (St. Matt. xxvi. 15.) A pious author, explaining this evangelical passage, observes that its every word deserves the most serious consideration, each one being replete with the gravest meaning. He then proceeds to examine the rank which Judas held, and he finds it so eminent that it seems impossible for a person occupying such a position to form in his heart so perfidious a design against his gracious and amiable benefactor. "Judas Iscariot," the same author says, "was one of the twelve; that is, he was not a stranger; he was not confounded amid the crowds that daily followed Jesus; nay, he was not simply one of the seventy-two disciples: he was one of the twelve, called to the apostolate by Jesus Christ Himself; one who had heard from the divine lips of Incarnate Wisdom

the sublime and supernatural doctrine of heaven; one who had received the power of healing the sick and of casting out devils. Finally, he was one who had been distinguished among his companions by his appointment to the office, which he then held, of treasurer and dispenser of the alms offered by generous benefactors for distribution among the poor, as well as for the corporal maintenance of Jesus and His followers.

Now, this ingrate presented himself to the chief priests, his Divine Master's bitterest enemies, who had assembled on former occasions and deliberated as to how they could put Him to death, and were now only awaiting a favorable opportunity to execute their heinous designs. Judas enacted this treachery without cause. He was not instigated nor even advised to do so by any one; he acted through mere malice. When did this ingrate enter upon the execution of his diabolical project and set out on his journey to the palace of Caiphas? He did not go there when the enemies of Jesus were apart, but when they were gathered together, deliberating how they might be enabled to apprehend Him and put Him to death. Then it was that Judas appeared and stood ready to carry out their nefarious plans. "What will you give me," he eagerly exclaimed, "and I will deliver Him unto you?" This is equivalent to saying, "I have something to sell, but something so despicable that I do not dare to affix a price to it; do you yourselves name the amount you are willing to advance." They then offered him thirty pieces of silver. "They appointed him thirty pieces of silver." Judas was well satisfied with this sum of money; and, from that hour forth he exerted himself to find the earliest opportunity of carrying his infamous project into execution.

But the malice of the fallen apostle does not stop here Dionysius Carthusianus, commenting upon the above-quoted text of the Gospel, says that the traitor left Bethania after having heard his Divine Master foretell that He would be crucified within two days. The same author further observes that Judas, when presenting himself to the chief priests and ancients of the people, was fully convinced of the divinity of Jesus Christ, and knew, or, at least, had reason to believe, that the enemies of his Divine Master were already assembled in order to compass His arrest and execution. Hence the ingrate unceremoniously inquires, "What are you willing to give me?" He might as well have said, "I know what motive has brought you together; I know the object of your discussions; I know what causes your uneasiness: behold, I am here, able and ready to extricate you from your perplexity. Only tell how much you will pay me for my services, and I will deliver Him unto you in the secret manner which you desire."

Unhappy Judas! foolish and infamous merchant! How have you become so blind as to commit a crime so atrocious, so horrible, so heinous? Do you, then, value your Divine Master at so low a rate as to be willing to sell Him for thirty pieces of silver? And you would, perhaps, have sold Him for less, had less been offered? O Judas! how has your Master offended you? Ingrate, so soon, then, you forget the many favors you have received from Him! Do you not remember His numerous miracles? or do you think that Jesus cannot evade your snares as, on many previous occasions, He evaded those of His other enemies? Unhappy Judas! You have sold the gem of Paradise, the joy of heaven, the beloved of God. For thirty pieces of silver you have bartered the

Lamb, a drop of whose blood is infinitely more valuable than all the silver and gold in the world.

The betrayal of Judas is of such a nature that the more we consider it, the more it excites our anger and fills us with horror. But our indignation against the evil deeds of that treacherous apostle will avail nothing unless we detest our faults from the bottom of our hearts. It is true that our faults may not exhibit the deep malice which we perceive in the betrayal of Judas; yet we must ever remember that they offend the majesty of God.

Second Point.

Having excited in our hearts an intense detestation of Judas's terrible crime, let us pass to a consideration of the causes which induced him to betray his Divine Master.

Dionysius Carthusianus says that the treachery of Judas should not surprise us, for he was avaricious; and the avaricious man is capable of any crime. Indeed, we can easily see from the context of the Gospel that avarice, and avarice alone, dragged Judas to the abyss of iniquity into which he fell.

St. Matthew speaks of a banquet which a certain Simon, surnamed the leper, gave to our Divine Lord and His disciples some time during the brief sojourn of Jesus in Bethania, previous to the celebration of the Jewish Pasch. The Evangelist relates that while Jesus was seated at table, a woman—probably Mary Magdalene—entered the room, carrying an alabaster box of precious ointment, and that, having come near to Him, she poured the ointment on His sacred head. This action was witnessed by the apostles, who began to murmur, saying, "To what pur-

pose is this waste? For this might have been sold for much and given to the poor." Our Lord heard those murmurings and gently reproved His disciples for them. He admonished them against blaming the conduct of the woman, for she had wrought a good work upon Him; and, refuting their reasoning concerning the needs of the poor, He said, "For the poor you have always with you: but Me you have not always. For she in pouring this ointment upon My body, hath done it for My burial" (Matt. xxvi. 11, 12).

The apostles at once acquiesced, submissively accepting this amiable reprimand, Judas excepted. He, because he was a thief—"*et latro erat*"—would not submit. Being treasurer and procurator of what may be called the household of our Lord, he thought that if the precious ointment were intrusted to him, he could sell it and retain part of the price for himself. Because his miserly desire was not gratified, he became furiously enraged. He left the house, went directly to Jerusalem, presented himself to the chief priests and ancients of the people, and betrayed his Divine Master, selling Him for the paltry sum of thirty pieces of silver to indemnify himself, as it were, for the money he deemed he had lost by not being able to obtain and sell the precious ointment. Having accomplished his execrable design, Judas returned to Bethania. Our Blessed Lord knew the heinous crime which His wretched apostle had perpetrated; the traitor's guilt glared from his countenance: yet Jesus did not reproach him, nor show any resentment towards him. On the contrary, He went to meet him, as some pious authors say, and tenderly embraced and kissed him. Our Divine Lord acted thus in order to move the heart of Judas to repentance and induce him to detest his grievous sin.

But the traitor, far from casting himself at the feet of his Merciful Master and imploring pardon, remained obstinate.

Behold to what a miserable state avarice, the love of gold and silver, has reduced an apostle! Those in whom this dangerous and baleful passion predominates, seldom correct themselves. They fear that they may be deprived of the necessaries of life, and they reckon among such necessaries goods which are entirely superfluous. The avaricious have no mercy, no sense of humanity; they have no compassion for the needy, and often they do not sufficiently provide even for themselves. Nothing can move them, soften them, deter them. Neither death, nor judgment, nor heaven, nor hell, nor eternity can affect their sordid hearts. Judas had often seen his Divine Master render Himself invisible to His enemies and pass through their very midst; he had seen Jesus perform many miracles; he had had countless proofs of His omnipotence and divinity. But Judas was no longer subject to reason: ruled by avarice, he could only think of gold and silver. Gold and silver absorbed all his thoughts, and their acquisition constituted his desires. Let the soul be lost, let Christ be sold as a slave—it matters not, so riches be acquired! O Judas, what a terrible example your life affords of the miseries to which avarice surely leads! Terrible warning for all. Alas, that for many it is given in vain! Let us endeavor to profit by it, and never regard as lost what we give for the glory of God and the support of the poor.

CONSIDERATION VII.

Jesus Christ takes leave of His Beloved Mother.

"To what shall I compare thee? or to what shall I liken thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? to what shall I equal thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Sion? For great as the sea is thy destruction."—*Lamentations* ii. 13.

First Point.

THE holy Gospel does not mention that our Divine Saviour held a farewell interview with His beloved Mother, but we may piously believe that He did. It is very probable that Jesus, who had always conducted Himself with the greatest respect and utmost submission towards His blessed Mother, did not undertake the rough road to Calvary without acquainting her of His intentions and seeking her consent. This is the opinion of the Seraphic Doctor, St. Bonaventure, who describes the last farewell which our Lord took of His Mother before entering upon His passion; and this opinion is confirmed by the revelations which Mary made to St. Bridget. Indeed, it is but reasonable to believe that God, who sought consent of the holy Virgin before taking flesh in her pure womb, should likewise ask her permission to consummate the grand sacrifice which was the chief end of His mission on earth. Who can describe the emotions of a dutiful and loving son when taking leave of his mother to set out upon a long and dangerous journey? Language is inade-

quate to such a task. If this medium fails to express what a mere man feels on those occasions, how can it depict the intensity of grief experienced by a son, who, besides being man, is also God; and who, instead of going on a journey to a distant country, is about to go to the place of execution to suffer a most cruel and ignominious death? If the grief of the son is inexpressible, what shall we say of that of the mother, who is naturally more sensitive and affectionate? However, availing ourselves of the meditations of St. Bonaventure, we shall imagine that Jesus Christ is in Bethania at the house of Martha. It is the eve of the Jewish Pasch, commemorated in our day on the evening of Wednesday in Holy Week. Immediately after supper Jesus takes His Mother aside, and leads her into a solitary apartment. There they sit down, and after a prolonged and painful silence, Jesus thus addresses Mary:

"My dearly beloved Mother, but little time remains for Me to be with you. It is the will of My Eternal Father; I must accomplish the end for which I came into the world. The time for the redemption of mankind has arrived; all the prophecies concerning Me are now to be fulfilled; I shall be delivered into the hands of My enemies, and they will scourge Me, crown Me with thorns, and crucify Me. I thank you, My dear Mother, for all the toils and hardships which you have endured for My sake; and, as you gave your consent to My incarnation, I now wish you to give your consent to My death."

Thus speaks Jesus, the most dutiful of sons; but what answer comes from the most loving of mothers? Oh! how justly may we address Mary in the language of Scripture: "To what shall I compare thee? or to what

shall I liken thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? to what shall I equal thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Sion? For great as the sea is thy destruction." Mary was transfixed by the bitterness of her grief; speech failed her trembling lips, and she gave vent to her sorrow in a flood of tears. But, as was revealed to St. Bridget, those tears, instead of alleviating the pain of her beloved Son, only augmented it more and more. This increased anguish of Jesus was a fresh source of affliction to His blessed Mother. But some may say, with St. Bernard, Did not Mary know that her Divine Son was to die upon the cross? Without doubt she knew it; and, furthermore, she was fully and certainly assured as to what was to be the manner of His death. Why, therefore, did she grieve for what she had expected, especially when she knew that in a few days Jesus would give her the ineffable joy and consolation of His triumphant resurrection from the tomb? She grieved because she was a mother—and the Mother of God. O Mary, most amiable Mother! by that sword of sorrow which pierced thy tender heart when thy dearly beloved Son requested thy consent to His immolation upon the cross for my salvation, obtain for me a sincere repentance of my sins, and the grace that I may never forget that my crimes were the cause of thy anguish and that of thy Divine Son.

Second Point.

When the Archangel Gabriel announced to the Blessed Virgin Mary that she had been chosen by Heaven to be the mother of the future Messias, she became all disturbed, and, before consenting to accept the ineffable honor which was about to be conferred upon her, she questioned

the angel, saying, "How shall this be done?" So, likewise, when her Divine Son told her that He was about to give up His life for the redemption of mankind by dying on the cross on Mount Golgotha, she became very much distressed, she trembled, and her pure heart was pierced by a sword of keenest anguish. It is very true that she knew that her beloved Son came down from heaven to redeem mankind by shedding the last drop of His precious blood; but, at the same time, she could not easily persuade herself to give Him up. Her trouble and perplexity were very great. It was hard to consent to the death of her dear and only Son; still, by refusing her consent, she would oppose the will of the Eternal Father and interfere with the redemption of mankind. Finding herself in the midst of these perplexing doubts and not knowing what to do, Mary committed herself entirely into the hands of Divine Providence; and, according to the Seraphic Doctor, St. Bonaventure, she addressed our Divine Lord in broken and trembling accents, saying, "My beloved Son, I feel all disturbed and my heart faints within me: let your Eternal Father decide, for I know not what to answer." Mary would have said more, but her tears and anguish prevented. Knowing that she could not change the eternal decrees, she became perfectly resigned to the divine will; and, with an heroic courage worthy only of the Mother of God, she not only consented to the death of her Divine Son, but she resolved to accompany Him to Calvary, where, rising superior even to herself, she stood at the foot of the cross during the three long hours of Jesus' agony, and afterwards received His sacred body into her motherly arms upon its descent from the cross.

St. Bonaventure here exclaims, "Oh! if you could

see how much suffering Mary endured in giving her consent to the death of her beloved Son, you would, perhaps, be melted into tears of compassion. But if you cannot see her with your corporal eyes, behold her with those of faith; and know that Mary made this sacrifice for love of you. Betake yourself in spirit to Bethania, and imagine that you are present at the meeting of Jesus and Mary on that sad night, and, prostrating yourself at their feet, say, "O Son of the Eternal Father, O Mother of the Eternal Son, how can I ever repay you for the great love which you manifested for me on this occasion of your painful parting? When shall my heart burn with love for you? O ungrateful heart, can you longer remain attached to creatures and reflect that Mary, the Mother of God, so loved you that she willingly gave up her dearly beloved Son, and consented that He should be put to death for your sake? Alas! how long shall we seek to gratify our sinful passions—we, miserable wretches, for whom the Son of Mary abandoned His most amiable Mother, and died upon the cross? In conclusion, let us remember that we can never become partakers of the eternal glory of heaven unless we endeavor to imitate Jesus and Mary in their sufferings. Let us, therefore, when oppressed by infirmities, adversities, or tribulations, meditate on the sufferings of our Divine Saviour, and bear in mind that all the afflictions which we have to endure in this vale of tears are merely nothing when compared with the sufferings of Jesus and Mary.

CONSIDERATION VIII.

Jesus celebrates His Last Pasch with the Apostles.

"And when the hour was come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him; and He said to them: With desire I have desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer."—*St. Luke* xxii. 14, 15.

First Point.

IT was on the morning of Holy Thursday, which, according to the Jewish rite, was the first day of the unleavened bread, and occurred on the fourteenth day of the moon of March. Jesus was still in Bethania, at the house of Martha, His generous and pious benefactress. The apostles came to Him and said, "Whither wilt Thou that we go, and prepare for Thee to eat the Pasch?" (St. Mark xiv. 12.) Choosing two of His disciples, Peter and John, Jesus said to them, "Go ye into the city: and there shall meet you a man carrying a pitcher of water, follow him: and whithersoever he shall go in, say to the master of the house, The Master saith: Where is My refectory, where I may eat the Pasch with My disciples? And he will show you a large dining room furnished: and there prepare ye for us." The Evangelist subjoins, "And His disciples went their way, and came into the city: and they found as He had told them, and they prepared the Pasch."

The poverty and divinity of Jesus Christ are strikingly manifested in this evangelical passage. His poverty, be-

cause He had no place wherein to celebrate the Jewish Pasch, for which reason He sent His disciples to find a place; His divinity, because, as master of the universe, He had only to ask in order to obtain whatever He desired. A similar circumstance is connected with His triumphant entry into Jerusalem. He then also sent two of His disciples to a house to take a beast of burden of which He had need. However, His divinity is more manifest in this second instance; for He did not say to His disciples, "Go to such a house and tell the master," but He said, "Go ye into the city: and there shall meet you a man carrying a pitcher of water, follow him: and he will show you a large dining-room furnished: and there prepare ye for us."

A devout author explaining the reason why our Lord did not specify any particular house, says that it was because Jesus knew that Judas was seeking an opportunity to deliver Him into the hands of His enemies; and were they made aware of where the Pasch was to be celebrated, he would inform the chief priests and ancients of the people, who would at once send soldiers to disturb the feast, and, perhaps, the master of the house. Thus, by not mentioning openly the place where He wished to celebrate the Pasch, Jesus showed how great was the goodness and tenderness of His heart towards His friends.

At sunset, our Divine Redeemer, accompanied by His twelve apostles, set out on the way to Jerusalem. Avoiding Bethphage and Mount Olivet, He took the road which passed near the sepulchre of Josaphat, between Mount Olivet and the Mount of Scandal. This was the usual and shortest way. Jesus' joy on this eve was great, and that of the disciples was not less; but it was a joy that would not outlast the feast. The Divine

Master was well aware of what was to happen at the close of that day. He knew that for Him and His beloved disciples joy was soon to be turned into sorrow. Therefore, we may imagine that upon leaving the house of Martha, Jesus said to Himself, "For the last time I am leaving Bethania as a mortal man." Proceeding on His way, He may have noticed a sycamore-tree, and cried, in the sadness of His heart, "On this tree one of My disciples will hang himself to-morrow." While crossing the valley of Josaphat, He may have glanced towards the Garden of Olives and thought, "To-night I shall return here, no longer to contemplate the joys of heaven, but to abandon Myself to a mortal agony." Passing over the torrent of Cedron, He may have said within Himself, "I shall cross this torrent again to-night, but not in company with My disciples: I shall be bound as a malefactor, and surrounded by My bitterest enemies and most cruel executioners." Entertaining those pious thoughts in our minds, let us go in spirit with Jesus to Jerusalem. It will be profitable for us to exercise our imagination in the production of vivid pictures of those holy places, for they have power to awaken in our minds many pious thoughts and tender recollections.

Second Point.

Having reached Jerusalem, Jesus proceeded to that portion of the city which is situated on the southern part of Mount Sion. Here was located the house in which the Pasch was prepared for Him and His disciples. They repaired thither, entered, and found everything in readiness. After a brief interval of rest they took their places at the table and began to eat the legal supper,

which consisted of unleavened bread, some lettuce, and roast lamb. According to the Jewish rite, this paschal lamb was specially selected from the flock, was spotless, and, five days before the sacrifice, was brought to Jerusalem amid rejoicing and festivity. This celebrated feast of the Passover was ever a joyous one among the Jews, for it commemorated that happy night on which the Angel of the Lord slew all the first-born of the Egyptians, thus delivering the Israelites from their cruel bondage; and, opening a path for them through the Red Sea, God guided them miraculously across the desert into the promised land. In memory of those benefits the Jews were obliged to eat the paschal lamb standing and with staves in their hands.

While Jesus was partaking of the mysterious lamb, His divine countenance suddenly lighted up and beamed for a moment with unusual joy; then, turning to His disciples, He sighed deeply and said, "With desire I have desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer. For I say to you, that from this time I will not eat it, till it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Having spoken these words, Jesus took the chalice into His sacred hands and, after giving thanks, said, "Take, and divide it among you; for I say to you, that I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, till the kingdom of God come" (St. Luke xxii. 15–18).

"Oh, how wondrous was the magnanimity of Jesus Christ!" exclaims St. Laurence Justinian, commenting upon the conduct of our Divine Lord at the Last Supper. And truly what soul can be so insensible as not to be moved by it? Jesus Christ is about to enter upon His bitter passion; before His mind arises a vision of all the opprobrium so soon to be heaped upon Him; He knows

that this night will be for Him a night of anguish and torments; He knows that on the morrow at this same hour He will be dead, even taken from the cross and buried. Yet He is full of joy; all His thoughts are directed to His disciples; He endeavors to console and comfort them, without any concern whatever for Himself. Such utter disinterestedness is out of the common order of nature; for we know that a man about to be executed, far from experiencing a feeling of joy and exultation, becomes saddened and all concentrated in himself. He grows oblivious to all around him, thinking only of his own dread fate and the terrible journey on which he is to depart. Not so, however, with Jesus Christ. He seems to forget Himself, anxious only to console His disciples: thus He clearly manifested His charity, magnanimity, and divinity.

O admirable love! O love truly worthy of the Son of God! And shall we not endeavor to correspond to this divine charity? Shall we remain indifferent or lukewarm towards our loving Redeemer? Alas! if we have hitherto been ungrateful, let us resolve to be so no more. If we have not the heroic virtue which animated the saints with an eager desire of suffering in order to please God, let us at least bear with patience and resignation the unavoidable trials and sufferings of our daily life.

In order to derive more profit from this meditation, let us imagine ourselves present in the supper-room with Jesus and the apostles, lovingly admitted there to partake with them of the legal supper; then we may consider as addressed to ourselves those affectionate words which the fond Master spoke to His disciples: "With desire I have desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer."

CONSIDERATION IX.

Jesus washes His Apostles' Feet.

"He cometh therefore to Simon Peter. And Peter saith to Him: Lord, dost Thou wash my feet? . . . Thou shalt never wash my feet."—*St. John* xiii. 6, 8.

First Point.

THE legal supper of the paschal lamb being ended, Jesus Christ wished to give another supper which should prove an additional wonder of love. He arose from the table, and, laying aside His garments, took a towel with which He girded Himself; He then poured water into a basin, "and began to wash the feet of the disciples, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded." He came to Simon Peter; but this fervent disciple, overwhelmed with confusion at the thought of the grandeur and divine majesty of Him who presented Himself in so humble a posture before him, cried out, "Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?" This was the same as to say: "Lord, Thou who art the Creator of heaven and earth; Thou who hadst no beginning, and shalt never have end; Thou in whose presence the Angels tremble and the Seraphim bow down; Thou who art the Son of God, the Holy One!—and dost Thou come to wash my feet? to perform this menial service towards me, a man so full of imperfections, a mere worm of the earth? And

Thou comest to wash my feet with those omnipotent hands which built the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth! with those hands with which Thou openedst the eyes of the blind, and the ears of the deaf, and gave speech to the dumb! with those pure hands which cleansed the leper, fed the hungry, banished evil spirits, and raised the dead! And Thou comest to wash, not my hands, but my feet which are less noble members of my body! Lord, Thou wash my feet! Thou prostrate Thyself before me, while all created things, celestial, terrestrial, and infernal are prostrate before Thee!"

St. John Chrysostom, paraphrasing the words of St. Peter, puts these words into the mouth of the apostle: "Thou art the master, I am the servant; Thou art the creator, I am the creature; Thou art God, I am only man; Thou wishest to wash my feet, and I, a poor, miserable sinner—no! it shall not be: Thou shalt never wash my feet!"

Thus did St. Peter in the fervor of his love speak to his Divine Master. Jesus knew that Peter's repugnance sprung from the profound respect and veneration which he entertained for his Lord. Yet, to show us that obedience is better than sacrifice, and that it should be preferred before any other virtue, Jesus, with a serene and majestic countenance, said to St. Peter, "If I wash thee not, thou shalt have no part with Me." Peter, affrighted by this terrible menace, exclaimed, "Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!" But the Divine Redeemer knew well the cleanness of heart of him whom He had chosen for His vicar on earth, and the visible head of the Church militant. With great affability Jesus reassured him, saying: "He that is washed needeth not but to wash his feet, but is clean wholly. And you are

clean, but not all" (St. John xiii. 10). Without manifesting to the other disciples the treachery of Judas, Jesus abruptly broke off His discourse, well satisfied that Judas understood the dread allusion which was conveyed in the words, "And you are clean, but not all." Jesus wished to intimate to Judas that his treachery was known, in order that the wretch might realize in his guilty soul that nothing is hidden from his Divine Master.

Then the Saviour proceeded to wash the feet of the other apostles; nor did He meet with any resistance from them: they were too much affrighted by the words which Jesus addressed to Peter,—him who was to be their head and master after the withdrawal of Christ's visible presence.

Here we should pause to reflect on the profound humility of our Holy Redeemer in washing His disciples' feet. In imitation of Him, let us resolve to be humble also. Let us frequently make acts of this great virtue, especially when about to approach the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, in order to render ourselves more worthy of its reception.

Second Point.

Theophylactus, commenting on the above mysterious ceremony of the Washing of Feet, offers as his opinion that Jesus Christ did not first approach St. Peter, but Judas Iscariot; and that the Divine Master adopted this course of action in order to give the traitor a marked sign of His love and esteem, and a token of the ready and generous pardon which he could at once obtain if he would only repent of his crime. This opinion is deduced partly from the Gospel, partly from a consideration of the wickedness of Judas, and partly from a con-

ception of the profound respect which the other apostles entertained for our Lord. Theophylactus reasons thus: The Gospel says that Jesus Christ "began to wash the feet of the disciples, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded." *Then* He came to Peter, according to the Latin text, "*Deinde venit ad Petrum.*" Therefore, before approaching the feet of Peter, our Lord had already washed those of some other disciple. But, excepting Judas, which of the apostles could witness so great an abasement of his Divine Master, and not offer the slightest resistance nor manifest the least sign of surprise? If Christ had opened the ceremony by washing the feet of any apostle other than Judas, undoubtedly such apostle would have said as Peter did say a moment later, "Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?" But these or similar words were spoken by none except Peter; at least there is no scriptural record of such an utterance made by any other apostle. In all probability, therefore, Jesus began the ceremony of the Washing of Feet by prostrating Himself before Judas, the only disciple who could witness such a sight without showing any sign of surprise or confusion. St. Bernard entertained the same opinion. "The perfidy of Judas," the holy Doctor maintains, "was not unknown to his Divine Master; Jesus knew well that Judas' feet were running fast in the dread path which led to consummate treachery and deicide: yet He did not hesitate to deal with him as with the other apostles; nay, Judas was the very first before whom the Divine Master prostrated Himself in the performance of this extraordinary act of humility." At this point in his commentary, St. Bernard breaks out into the following impassioned apostrophe: "O man, thou who art but dust and ashes, how darest thou lift up thy head in pride and

arrogance? How darest thou give way to impatience and anger? Behold and admire the meekness and humility of Jesus Christ, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Judge of the living and the dead, and be ashamed and confounded at the thought of thy pride and haughtiness! He who is God prostrates Himself before mere men; and thou, a vile worm of the earth, disdainest to humble thyself before God! He who is innocence itself, He who is sanctity itself, deigns to wash the vile feet of Judas the traitor; and thou who art guilty of a thousand crimes refusest to approach the sacred tribunal to wash away thy iniquity! He, before instituting the most august Sacrament of the Altar, humbled Himself so far as to wash the feet of Judas; and thou, before partaking of the Eucharistic banquet, art unwilling to banish from thy heart the hatred and rancor which thou entertainest towards those persons who have given thee offence!"

Thus reasons a holy Doctor of the Church; and thus also should we reason if we would derive spiritual profit from the sublime lesson of humility which our amiable Redeemer gives us in the washing of His disciples' feet. For this purpose let us frequently repeat those words of St. Peter, "Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?" Let us often meditate on them, as also on those words of St. Francis of Assisi who, unable to express the ardor of divine love which he experienced at the thought of Christ's humility in becoming our food, used frequently to say, "My God, my God! who art Thou, and who am I? My God, my God! who art Thou, and who am I?"

The principal fruits which we should derive from this meditation are a great horror of pride, which is the root of all other vices, and a profound esteem for holy humility, the queen of virtues and the foundation of Christian

perfection. The proud can never be dear to God, and they soon become odious to men; but the humble are beloved by all and advance in virtue from day to day. Let us learn from the example of our Blessed Redeemer to practise the holy virtue of humility, and we shall receive an immense reward in time and in eternity.

CONSIDERATION X.

Words spoken by our Holy Redeemer after the Washing of Feet.

"Then after He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, being set down again, He said to them: Know you what I have done to you? You call me Master, and Lord: and you say well, for so I am. If then I, being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet: you also ought to wash one another's feet."— *St. John* xiii. 12–14.

First Point.

AFTER having washed the feet of His dearly beloved disciples, Jesus Christ exhorted them to love one another and to practise holy humility, the queen of all virtues. He said to them: "You call me Master, and Lord: and you say well, for so I am. If then I, who am your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." This address was tantamount to saying, "If I, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Creator of heaven and earth, have so far abased Myself as to wash the feet of My creatures, My disciples, to wash the feet of Judas; how much more ought you to do the same to one another, to pity one another, love one another, help one another: you who are children of the same Father, who are all alike but dust and ashes, who are all subject to the same diseases, miseries, and misfortunes! Do, therefore, to one another as I have done to you. Blessed, indeed, shall you be, if, having penetrated into the meaning of My words

and learned how pleasing to Me is the virtue of humility, you endeavor to imitate My example and show yourself in every action meek and humble of heart."

This was the admirable lesson which the Divine Redeemer gave to His apostles after the mysterious Washing of Feet. A pious author explaining these words, "Know you what I have done to you?" speaks thus: "If you wish to know what Christ did for His apostles at the Last Supper, you can be easily informed. He prostrated Himself before them, washed and, according to a pious tradition, kissed their feet. But if you inquire still further and ask to know what was done for them not merely at the Last Supper, but from the very beginning, the answer will be quite another. It will lead us back to the very hour of creation. This Divine Lord created them out of nothing; when they were incapable of loving God, He infused that divine love into their hearts; nor did He make them after the image of any created thing, but according to His own image and likeness, imprinting on their souls, as it were, an image of the Most Holy Trinity by gifting them with will, memory, and understanding. He gave them the great gift of free will; He gave them angels for their guardians and constant companions; He created this world for their benefit; He prescribed a law for them which, if faithfully observed, would guide them to eternal life; He granted them the pardon of their sins; when He became man He taught them the knowledge of the way to heaven; He healed the sick among them; He raised their dead to life; in a word, He granted them all the graces and blessings of which they stood in need. Might not Jesus well ask His disciples, 'Know you what I have done to you?'"

Now, all the general benefits which Jesus Christ conferred on His apostles have been likewise given to each of us. He created this visible wonderful world for us; He created us out of nothing; He loved us from eternity; He created us to His own image and likeness; He endowed us with will, memory, and understanding; He destined us for heaven; He instituted seven Sacraments for our sanctification; in short, He accomplished the grand work of human redemption for us.

How have we corresponded to these immense benefits? What have we done in return? Alas! we have repaid our Divine Lord with the basest ingratitude. Let us, therefore, endeavor to change our life, firmly resolving to become true followers of Jesus. To attain this end let us often reflect on the benefits which He has bestowed on us from the hour of our creation to this very moment; we shall then be able to understand how truly worthy Jesus is of all our love and gratitude.

Second Point.

The example of our Holy Redeemer should not only be admired, but it should also be imitated. "If then I, being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." This was equivalent to saying, Let man do what God did; let the servant imitate the example of his master. No human dignity should refuse to do what the Master of heaven and earth did; what the Master practised should be practised by the servant, and no Christian should disdain to do what Christ Jesus did.

St. Augustine explaining the following passage of the Gospel, "Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble

of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls," paraphrases it thus: "Learn of Me not to build the world, not to create visible and invisible things, not to work miracles, not to raise the dead to life: but learn to be meek and humble of heart."

We are not required to go into strange countries in order to perform works of charity; we are not required to expose our lives to enlighten those "who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death;" we are not required to undertake any long and dangerous journey, nor to enter the cloister; no, our Merciful Lord does not exact so much from us. To do those things requires graces from heaven which are not granted to all, but to a few only. All that is required of the faithful at large is the observance of the divine law, and perfect submission to Him whose yoke is sweet and whose burden is light. We are commanded to bear with patience our own and our neighbor's infirmities, to abstain from those things which are forbidden by the commandments of God and of the Church, and to be faithful Christians not only in name but also in deed.

It is not necessary to perform heroic actions in order to be Christians; nor is it necessary to go to distant countries to practise Christian virtues. They may be practised everywhere. We are surrounded on all sides by powerful enemies; we are especially assailed by our common enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil; therefore, we shall always have occasions to practise the virtues of patience and resignation. We can also frequently exercise ourselves in the virtue of charity by assisting our fellow-creatures, by advising them, and praying for them. Opportunities are never wanting to practise voluntary mortifications in order to atone for

our faults. Finally, we should ever show ourselves true followers of Christ by a close and constant imitation of His virtues, especially those of meekness and humility.

Let us imagine ourselves present at the mysterious Washing of Feet, and consider as addressed to us those memorable words of Jesus Christ: "For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also." If Jesus so humbled Himself as to wash the feet of His disciples, we ought to humble ourselves as far, at least, as to forgive our enemies: since Jesus did all for us, we ought to do something for Him. Finally, let us impress deeply on our minds those words of our Lord, "I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also." Could a king ask less of his subjects? Could a captain ask less of his soldiers? Could a master ask less of his servants? And this is all that Jesus asks of us—to follow His example. "If you know these things, you shall be blessed if you do them" (St. John xiii. 17).

CONSIDERATION XI.

Jesus Christ predicts the Perfidy of Judas.

"And whilst they were eating, He said: Amen I say to you, that one of you is about to betray Me. And they being very much troubled, began every one to say: Is it I, Lord?"—*St. Matt.* xxvi. 21, 22.

First Point.

THE Divine Master had scarcely ended His sublime discourse on humility and fraternal charity, when His countenance underwent a sudden change; a change which was not caused by fear, but by a feeling of intense anguish. Turning to His apostles, He said, "Amen I say to you, that one of you is about to betray Me." And appropriating to Himself the words of the Royal Psalmist, He may, perhaps, have addded: "If an enemy of mine had cursed Me, I could have borne it in peace. But that a disciple of Mine, one whom I have chosen as a coadjutor in the work of the salvation of mankind; one who has always lived in harmony with Me, and has so often heard from My lips the words of eternal life; one who has often broken bread with Me at My table, and witnessed so many of My miracles; one who has received from Me power to perform even greater wonders than I have wrought, and who has been benefited by Me in every way—that this ingrate should now have the infamous courage to conspire against Me, and is now awaiting a favorable opportunity to betray Me into the hands

of My bitter enemies—this, this it is that afflicts Me most profoundly." Some expositors of the sacred text maintain that when Jesus had spoken thus He turned His eyes upon Judas to observe whether His divine words had gone home to the traitor's heart, and whether the poor wretch would show any sign of sorrow and repentance. Our loving Saviour still wished to encourage Judas to have confidence in the infinite mercy of God, and not to fear the wrathful effects of His terrible justice. Seeing, however, that the unfaithful disciple still remained obdurate, and that he was deaf to all those tender appeals and insensible to the stings of his guilty conscience, Jesus passed from words of gentle rebuke to the utterance of this awful menace: "Woe to that man by whom the Son of man shall be betrayed! It were better for him if that man had not been born." These terrible words were designed not only to reproach Judas with the enormity of his crime, but also to arouse in him a salutary fear of eternal torments, in order that he might, perhaps, be led to repentance. Upon hearing this awful menace of Jesus Christ the apostles were filled with a great fear. But, excepting Judas, each had the testimony of a good conscience and persisted in considering as not addressed to himself the words which the Master had uttered. Jesus had spoken too plainly to be misunderstood; all the disciples knew at once that a traitor was in their midst. They became very sad, and, wishing to be exonerated from suspicion, they began one after another to question the Master, saying, "Is it I, Lord?" The eleven faithful apostles were conscious of their innocence; but they had learned from the teachings of Christ that, on account of the frailty of human nature, man is fickle and easily moved from even his firmest resolutions. Hence

they deeply distrusted their own strength and questioned, "Is it I, Lord?" They feared lest they might perpetrate a crime of which they had never even thought.

This conduct of our Lord towards Judas furnishes us with a grand and sublime example of the solicitude of Jesus for the conversion of sinners. How many inspirations and graces, how many examples and admonitions, does He not give us to induce us to return to Him! A mother has not so much anxiety for her darling child who lies dangerously ill, as God has for the salvation of our souls. If, then, we do not correspond to this most tender and loving solicitude, we shall be alone to blame for our eternal perdition.

Second Point.

Our Holy Redeemer saw that neither His secret admonitions nor His public menaces made any impression on the mind of Judas; and knowing that the other apostles were suffering for the evil intentions of that one man, He resumed His usual kindly manner, and, in order to relieve their anxiety, thus addressed them: "My dear children, let not what I have said sadden your hearts, for I did not speak of all. I know those whom I have elected to the apostolate, and I see in your hearts the horror which you entertain for the terrible crime of My betrayal. I know that eleven of My disciples are faithful, and that there is only one traitor among us. I foresaw, indeed, the ingratitude and perfidy of this apostate disciple from all eternity. I foresaw, also, that his divine call to the apostolate, together with all the numberless graces and favors which he was destined to receive, would not cause his conversion: yet I did not ex-

clude him, but I called him to follow Me, in order that the prophecies concerning Me might be accomplished." Thus Jesus spoke—so expositors of the Sacred Scriptures teach—for the purpose of calming the minds of His dearly beloved disciples, and also of affording the Iscariot another opportunity to reflect and repent.

It is to be noticed that Jesus had so far never once mentioned the name of His betrayer. Our Lord observed this divinely noble reticence in order to save the reputation which Judas enjoyed among his colleagues and before the public. But the wretch obstinately persisted in his iniquity, remaining insensible to the loving rebukes as well as to the terrible menaces of Jesus.

Father Euthemius, commenting on the terrible obstinacy of Judas Iscariot, takes occasion to reproach those sinners who, to extenuate their offences, attempt to maintain that they are driven into sin by the natural perversity of human nature, and that they are actually predestined to offend God. Such men exonerate Judas from all sin, because, say they, it had been decreed from all eternity that he was to be guilty of this heinous treachery to his Divine Master. We answer: The foreknowledge which God had of Judas' sin did not cause its commission. Judas, without any compulsion, but by an abuse of his free will, was, in time, to perpetrate the sin, and the omniscient God foreknew it from all eternity. Thus, though in the order of time Judas' sin was posterior to God's foreknowledge of it, in the order of reason it was anterior; or, in other words, God's foreknowledge of Judas' crime was not the cause of its commission, but the commission of the crime was the cause of God's foreknowledge of it. We must bear in mind that God does not compel any one to be good or bad. He has given

each of us a free will, and during our life He bestows on us numberless graces to enable us to use our will rightly and attain salvation. Those, therefore, who abuse this gift of free will, as Judas did, become doubly guilty: first, by yielding to their evil inclinations; secondly, by not corresponding to the graces which God gives them.

Let us pause for a moment to consider what divine favors had been bestowed on Judas. First, he was called to the apostolate that he might be convinced of the divinity of Jesus Christ and have less temptation to betray Him. Secondly, he was appointed treasurer of the alms received for the support of our Lord and the apostles, that, being so distinguished, he might have stronger motives for remaining faithful to his Divine Master. Thirdly, he was given the power of performing miracles, in order that, considering his great and sublime dignity, he might not be led to commit so detestable a crime as treachery. Fourthly, he was given more graces than any other of the apostles, so that he might have more strength to resist his depraved inclinations. To conclude, let us reflect that God wishes all men to be saved, and gives them graces sufficient to work out their salvation. He has given us free will that we may have merit for our good works. If we abuse our free will, the fault is ours. Let us, then, ask of God grace to enable us to use our free will rightly, and to persevere unto the end in the performance of good works, never for a moment allowing ourselves to despair of our salvation, but confidently relying on His mercy and placing all our hopes in the merits of Christ's passion and death.

CONSIDERATION XII.

Our Divine Redeemer tries by every Means to convert Judas.

"And Judas that betrayed Him, answering said: Is it I, Rabbi? He saith to him: Thou hast said it."—*St. Matt.* xxvi. 25.

First Point.

THE perfidious Judas heard the other apostles questioning their Master as to who among them was the traitor, and, for fear of being discovered by his colleagues, he also asked, "Is it I, Rabbi?"

Commenting on this effrontery of Judas, an impassioned author thus apostrophizes him and inveighs against him: "O wretch! O thief! O hypocrite! O traitor! O monster of iniquity! What? You have already been before the chief priests and ancients of the people; of your own free will you have offered to deliver your Divine Master into the hands of His enemies! You have already received the thirty pieces of silver, and for the past two days you have been seeking an opportunity to execute your diabolical plot! You are endeavoring, even now, to leave the supper-room to inform His enemies that He may now be easily arrested,—and yet you dare to ask Him, 'Is it I, Rabbi?' You know that He is the Man-God who can penetrate the inmost secrets of our hearts, and you have the audacity to ask Him, 'Is it I, Rabbi?' You have this very moment heard Him say with all cer-

tainty that one of His apostles is about to betray Him, and you know too well that He forbore mentioning your name because, in His divine charity, He did not wish to disgrace you before your colleagues and the public. You perceive clearly that He knows your infamous project,—and yet you ask, 'Is it I, Rabbi?' O unheard-of insolence! O unparalleled temerity! But hearken, O Judas! to the answer which your Divine Master, though shamefully betrayed by you, deigns to give; and from that answer, Judas, learn whether Jesus deserves to be so insultingly treated."

Our Divine Lord understood the full import of the Iscariot's question, all its insolence and temerity; but as He desired the conversion of the traitor, He patiently bore the effrontery and refrained from revealing his name. Considering, however, that further silence might render the fallen disciple more audacious, and impress him with the idea that his secret thoughts were unknown—an idea which would cause him to hurry on to the consummation of his crime—Jesus made known to Judas that He was aware of all by answering, "Thou hast said it," which was equivalent to saying, "Yes; you are the very one that has determined to betray Me, to sell Me to My bitter enemies."

The interpreters of Holy Scripture are of the opinion that Jesus spoke these words to Judas in secret. The Evangelist does not say whether the answer given by Jesus was heard by the other apostles. St. Peter, who had a great desire to know who the traitor was, requested St. John, the beloved disciple, to question the Master. John, therefore, who was "leaning on the breast of Jesus, saith to Him: Lord, who is it? Jesus answered: He it is to whom I shall reach bread dipped. And when He had

dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the morsel, Satan entered into him. And Jesus said to him: That which thou dost, do quickly. Now no man at the table knew to what purpose He said this unto him" (St. John xiii. 25–28). It is evident, therefore, that the apostles, John only excepted, knew nothing of Judas' treason. But not even this sublimely charitable reticence of Christ was sufficient to soften the traitor's heart.

We should pause here and meditate on the great tenderness which Jesus manifested towards His faithless apostle, and also on the obduracy shown by the latter. The one should encourage, the other affright us. Let us, therefore, resolve to govern our conduct by these two principles,—confidence in God, diffidence in self. Observing these, we shall infallibly arrive at the kingdom of God.

Second Point.

Our Holy Redeemer whispered only two words into the ear of His faithless disciple, "*Tu dixisti*"—"Thou hast said it." But how many words of holy inspiration, how many gentle words of invitation to repentance, did He not secretly address to the heart of the traitor? The spoken words of Jesus can be found in the holy Gospel; and some knowledge of the import of His secret addresses may be obtained from the Fathers of the Church, and from devout contemplators on the sufferings of Jesus. These holy writers ascribe to our Saviour words of most tender and loving appeal, such as only a consideration of the immensity of God's love can render credible. Thus does one writer make Jesus speak:

"My beloved disciple, tell Me what crime have I com-

mitted which causes you to deliver Me into the hands of My bitter enemies? What have I done to you, or in what have I displeased you? I have chosen you in preference to many others to be one of My apostles; I have conferred on you the power of working miracles; I have distinguished you among the twelve by appointing you treasurer and administrator of the alms given us by the faithful for our support and the needs of the poor; I have never asked you to render an account of your administration of the affairs of that office, for I have always placed confidence in you,—and now do you betray Me in return for all these benefits? O Judas! Judas, My beloved disciple, pause and consider whether I deserve to be treated so ungratefully. Remember, Judas, that I have loved you well and tenderly; and I still love you with all My heart. I ask nothing of you but that you love Me in return. I desire only your eternal salvation. For your salvation I came down from heaven and became man, and for you I am soon to shed the last drop of My blood. I wish you to share in the fruits of My bitter passion. I am still your dear Master, though you have forgotten to be My disciple. Be converted, and I promise that I will forget all. I will remember nothing but your docility to My call. Your fault shall meet with My tenderest compassion. Remember that I do not wish the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live.

"O Judas! Judas, it is not your Judge that now speaks to you, but your Redeemer; it is not the God of vengeance, but the Father of Mercies who calls you. Hearken to His loving voice; withdraw from the path of iniquity upon which you have entered, and in which, if you continue, you must surely perish. Do not turn a deaf ear to My merciful call. Do not harden your heart, nor de-

spise My holy grace. Quit your blind rage, and return to the path of virtue: it is divine clemency itself that calls you, that knocks at the door of your heart, to invite you to a new life."

Leo I., surnamed the Great, penetrated by a deep sense of the goodness manifested by our Divine Lord in His relations with Judas, thus apostrophizes the traitor, and explains at the same time the reason of his obduracy: "Why, unhappy Judas, do you not avail yourself of the goodness of your merciful Redeemer? Why do you not give, at least, a sign of interior repentance? Alas! the reason is only too plain," continues St. Leo; "Judas, who had ever been tardy in corresponding to divine grace, has now become deaf and dumb to the heavenly call. It is not the first time that Jesus speaks to his heart: Judas has habitually rejected divine grace, and now he is insensible to the mercies of heaven."

For strong reasons, then, have the holy Fathers of the Church occupied themselves in showing the great solicitude of our Saviour for the conversion of Judas. Their purpose was to encourage sinners to rely on the mercy of God, and never despair, no matter how grievous or numerous their sins might be; for if the divine mercy was great towards Judas, it is equally great towards us.

Encouraged, therefore, by the infinite goodness of our most amiable Redeemer, let us prostrate ourselves at His feet; and, detesting all our past sins from the bottom of our hearts, let us make a firm resolution nevermore to offend Him.

CONSIDERATION XIII.

Jesus institutes the Most August Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

"Jesus knowing that His hour was come that He should pass out of this world to the Father: having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end."—*St. John* xiii. 1.

First Point.

ST. JOHN the Evangelist tells us that Jesus, knowing that the hour for His departure from this world was at hand, resolved that the same tender, ceaseless love which He had always shown towards His disciples during His missionary career should shine out most resplendently in the last sad parting hour. The Eternal Father had subjected all things to the will of His beloved Son. Jesus, therefore, lifting up His eyes to heaven, thanked His Eternal Father for having conferred this unlimited power on Him even as man. Then taking bread, He blessed, broke, and gave it to His disciples, saying: "Take ye, and eat: this is My body." Then "taking the chalice, He gave thanks, and gave to them, saying: Drink ye all of this. For this is My blood of the New Testament which shall be shed for many unto the remission of sins."

Such were the words of our Divine Redeemer; words few and brief, but, as we know them in the Church of God, they are full of the deepest meaning. Interpreted in the light of Catholic doctrine, these words of Jesus

may thus be paraphrased: "I have instituted this august Sacrament, not only for the Church's spiritual benefit, but also for your spiritual comfort; therefore, I grant you power to renew it every day. You have seen what I did,—do ye also the same. I will descend from heaven whenever you utter the words of consecration. I will place myself at your disposal, that you may dispense Me to the faithful as spiritual food, and that you may keep Me on your altars and have recourse to Me in your spiritual and temporal needs. I will remain with you in this most venerable Sacrament until the consummation of the world, to comfort and strengthen you in the faith, and to help you to walk on courageously and perseveringly in the rough road of the cross. I give you one commandment, however: whenever you shall make this august Sacrament, you shall do so in commemoration of Me. I require only this of you, and I require it as an attestation of your gratitude for the benefits conferred on you in this holy Sacrament."

Could our Lord do more for our spiritual interests, and ask less from us in return? Before passing to a further consideration of this great act of our Saviour's love, let us try to enter into the sentiments which must have animated Him on this solemn occasion. Let us imagine that we see Him, His divine countenance all radiant, and that we hear issuing from His sacred lips this touching address: "My beloved disciples, I am at the end of My days, but I have not yet exhausted the treasures of My love and mercy. I can give no greater proof of My love than to die for the salvation of mankind: that proof I will to-morrow give you by sacrificing Myself to the Eternal Father to satisfy His justice. Learn, then, how great is My love for men, and how dear to Me is their

eternal salvation. But My charity does not stop here: it shall overleap the boundaries of death. Yes, on the very eve of My crucifixion, I have found a means which shall enable Me to remain among men even to the consummation of the world. In this holy Sacrament I shall dwell in their midst to hear their prayers, to console them in their sorrows, and to succor them in the trials and difficulties of their daily life. You, therefore, whom I have chosen for My disciples, announce to all men how much I have loved them; encourage them to have confidence in the merits of My passion; encourage them to have recourse to Me in their necessities, and I will hear and grant their petitions. These are the sentiments which fill my heart in these closing hours of My mortal life. But there is one thing which I demand of you in particular, and of all men in general, in return for My great love, and it is this: that you constantly remember how much I have suffered for you. If you will but keep this faithful remembrance of My sufferings, I shall consider My love sufficiently rewarded. Alas! I foresee that from the greater number of Christians I shall not receive even this poor boon of grateful remembrance. Nevertheless, I will never cease to love and benefit them; I will never ignore their tears nor reject their repentance. Sinners shall always find Me present on their altars, ready to embrace them and grant their petitions. I came down from heaven to bring, not the just, but sinners, to repentance. For the sake of sinners I became man; for their sake I have led a life of suffering and anguish; for their sake I am going to die to-morrow on the cross, and for their sake I wish to remain on earth after My death."

These expressions are far too weak to convey any adequate idea of the love which Jesus Christ manifested for

us in the institution of the Blessed Sacrament. But let us endeavor to make up for the feebleness of our expressions by the fervor and constancy of our devotion to Jesus ever present on our altars.

Second Point.

No holy Father, no expositor of Holy Scripture, no devout author, can find words to express adequately the grandeur, the sublimity of this most august Sacrament. The angels of heaven cover their faces in reverence before it, and humble themselves to the very ground to worship a mystery so great, so sublime. No one could have imagined the possibility of so great a mystery, had not Jesus Christ Himself revealed it. There are, therefore, no words to express the excellence of this Sacrament. Only a profound meditation can give us an idea of it—an idea so faint, however, as to be as far from the truth as the finite is from the infinite, the creature from the creator. Nevertheless, though there are not words adequate to express what should be our piety and zeal in view of the great benefits conferred on us in the Blessed Sacrament, yet we should avail ourselves of the best means at our disposal to awaken in our hearts a proper appreciation of its blessings. To this end, therefore, let us recall the words of the holy Fathers on the subject of the Blessed Eucharist.

St. Augustine says that God, all omnipotent as He is, is not able to bestow on us any greater favor, and that in the institution of this Sacrament He exhausted all the treasures of His omnipotence. For what more had God to give after He had given Himself? What greater gift than the gift of Himself?

"O admirable mystery!" exclaims Venerable John Tauler, "O sublime Sacrament! O ineffable love! O unheard-of generosity! The Donor is Himself the gift; the servant nourishes himself with the person of his Master; the domestic sits at the table of the King of Glory and partakes of His royal flesh; man eats of the bread of angels; the Eternal Father divides among His servants the body of His only-begotten Son, and gives them that Son's most precious blood to drink! But what intellect shall ever comprehend the profound mysteries of this admirable Sacrament?"

"O wonderful supper," says St. Bonaventure, "at which so many wondrous things were wrought by the hand of Omnipotence! This was the last supper, O my most amiable Jesus, that Thou wast to eat with Thy apostles, and Thou wast soon to depart from this world. At this last supper Thy charity inspired Thee to work many admirable wonders. But the greatest of all was the institution of the august Sacrament of the Altar, by which Thou hast left us forever a sweet and precious reminder of Thy passion and death."

"No Sacrament," says the Angelic Doctor St. Thomas, "is more salutary than this. By it sins are blotted out, virtues are increased, and the soul is enriched with an abundance of all spiritual graces. While in the other sacraments only grace is received, in the Eucharist the very Author of grace is received; and when God becomes one with me, what more have I to desire?"

The fruit of this consideration should be a firm resolution to approach the Eucharistic table frequently with the greatest respect and most profound veneration, acknowledging ourselves unworthy of this great and sublime Sacrament, but still reposing all our confidence in the

merits of Jesus Christ. Let us, therefore, prostrate ourselves at the feet of Jesus, and say to Him more with the heart than with the lips: "What is man that Thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that Thou visitest him? Thou hast made him a little less than the Angels; Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor: and hast set him over the works of Thy hands. Thou hast subjected all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen; moreover the beasts also of the field. The birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea, that pass through the paths of the sea. O Lord, our Lord, how admirable is Thy name in all the earth!" But all that Thou hadst done did not satisfy Thy love; for man Thou didst still do more. For him Thou didst take a human soul and body in the pure womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary; for him Thou didst subject Thyself to all the pains of infancy; for him Thou didst lead a life of hardship, privation, and persecution; finally, for him Thou didst shed the last drop of Thy most precious blood on the cross,—and what more could remain for Thee to do? It seems that all the treasures of Thy love should have been exhausted on Mount Calvary. But no; before ascending the sacred wood of the cross Thou didst consider that Thou wast about to immolate only Thy body for the expiation of our sins, and that Thy soul and divinity still remained to Thee. Thou didst wish to bestow these also upon us, and therefore Thou didst institute the most august Sacrament of the Eucharist. Great God! *Quid est homo quia magnificas eum?*

CONSIDERATION XIV.

Sermon of Jesus Christ after the Institution of the Blessed Sacrament.

"Little children, yet a little while I am with you."—*St. John* xiii. 33.

FIRST POINT.

WHEN Judas Iscariot had gone out of the supper-room, Jesus Christ, who knew well where the unhappy apostle was to betake himself, heaved a deep sigh and exclaimed, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." This glory, however, was to Jesus a source of anguish, because it had come to Him through the loss of a beloved disciple for whose conversion He had exhausted, as it were, all the treasures of His mercy. Then Jesus turned towards the eleven; and as a tender friend when setting out on a long journey affectionately bids farewell to his dear ones, or as a dying father gathers his beloved children around his bed to convey to them his last wishes, so does the Merciful Redeemer who, foreseeing the hour of His approaching sacrifice, thus addresses His apostles: "'Little children, yet a little while I am with you.' But the hour of My departure is at hand, and I go where you cannot come at present. As it is the parting hour, hear My last paternal injunctions, and impress them on your hearts, for they are given by the most tender of Fathers in the last

moments of His mortal life." Then Jesus said: "The first and most important command which I give you is that of charity. Dear children, love one another with that sincere affection with which I have loved you. By this love the world shall know that you are My disciples. This love shall be the mark of My true followers, the character by which the children of the Gospel shall be distinguished from the children of the world.

"Let not your hearts be troubled as you hear that I am about to leave you, because though where I go you cannot come at present, still the time will come when you also shall follow Me. I go before you to prepare you a place, and when it shall have been prepared I will come again and take you with Me. The words which I speak to you are not Mine, but they are suggested to Me by My Father.

"If you do not believe in Me, believe in My works; believe in the miracles which you have seen wrought by My hands—miracles of such a nature that they surpass all human power. As to those who will believe in Me, they, too, shall perform miracles, and even greater ones than I have performed, if they only ask the power from My Heavenly Father in My name. For whatever you ask the Father in My name, it shall be granted unto you, that the Father may be glorified in His Son. If then it is true that you love Me, keep My commandments; and I will ask the Father, and He will send you the Paraclete, who shall remain with you forever. The Paraclete shall be the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees nor knows Him; but you shall receive and recognize Him, because He shall abide with you and within you. Be, therefore, of good heart; for though I am going away, yet I will not leave you

orphans. The Holy Spirit who shall come after Me shall be a father to you. He shall explain to you all these great mysteries which you do not at present understand, and He will give you proofs of all the doctrines which I have preached to you. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, do I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid. You have heard that I said to you: 'I go away, and I come unto you. If you loved Me, you would, indeed, be glad, because I go to the Father: for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it came to pass: that when it shall come to pass you may believe.'"

Such was the sublime and ever-memorable discourse pronounced by our Divine Redeemer after the Last Supper; a discourse from which we should draw these three great lessons: First, that it is a strict duty incumbent upon us all to observe the great precept of charity, if we would be recognized as true followers of Jesus Christ. Second, that the observance of the commandments is of the utmost importance, if we wish to enter the kingdom of heaven. Third, that prayer is necessary in order to obtain from the Eternal Father grace to work out our salvation.

Second Point.

During the delivery of His affectionate farewell to His disciples, our Lord was frequently interrupted by them. Upon hearing the Master say, "Whither I go thou canst not follow Me now, but thou shalt follow hereafter," Peter, with a fervor quite peculiar to himself, exclaimed, "Why cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down My life for thee." Jesus answered: "Wilt thou lay down thy life for Me? Amen, amen I say to thee, the cock

shall not crow till thou deny Me thrice." St. Thomas, also, hearing Jesus say, "And whither I go you know, and the way you know," replied at once, "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?" Jesus made answer thus: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by Me." "Lord, show us the Father and it shall be enough for us," immediately rejoined St. Philip, to whom Jesus replied, "Philip, he that seeth Me seeth the Father also."

From these questions of the apostles, as well as from the replies of our Divine Lord, we are enabled to perceive that before the descent of the Holy Ghost the apostles were very ignorant of the truths of faith. Whence we may infer that had we not the light of the same Holy Spirit to guide us to a knowledge of God and His holy mysteries, we should now be in a like ignorance of them. We ought also to learn that we shall go, sooner or later, where our Lord has gone, provided we keep His commandments. But if we hear not the divine word and follow the maxims of the world, the Lord will not love us, nor reveal Himself to us, nor lead us to the kingdom of His Eternal Father.

It should be observed here that the great promises of our Divine Redeemer, far from making the apostles more fervent in the observance of the sublime maxims which He constantly taught during the three years of His public life, only served to inflame their ambition. For, hearing the Divine Master speak of His kingdom and future glory, and still believing that Jesus was to reign on earth, they began to dispute among themselves as to which of them should hold the first place in Christ's kingdom. O miserable human nature! how frail art thou? Only a few moments before the apostles had seen Jesus in an humble pos-

ture washing their feet; they had just received the Holy Eucharist; they had just been ordained priests, even the first bishops of the New Law; they had just heard from the lips of Jesus words of eternal life; they had just been assured by Him that His last hour was at hand, and that His enemies were soon to crucify Him: and instead of gathering around their Divine Master to console Him, they began to dispute among themselves. And their dispute, after all the lessons of humility given at the Last Supper, was about what? "There was a strife among them," the Scripture tells us, "which of them should seem to be the greater."

But let us hear how our Lord ended the dispute. "The kings of the gentiles," said Christ, "lord it over them; and they that have power over them are called beneficent. But you not so: but he that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is the leader, as he that serveth. For which is greater, he that sitteth at table or he that serveth? Is it not he that sitteth at table? But I am in the midst of you, as he that serveth." Those words of Jesus were equivalent to these: "I have humbled Myself so far as to assume human nature; I have even washed your feet; I have practised mortifications and humiliations of every kind; and if you would be My disciples, you should certainly imitate My example."

Thus Jesus ended His sublime lesson on humility, the foundation of all virtues. Let us, therefore, resolve to practise this great virtue in imitation of our Divine Lord, that we may daily become more pleasing in His sight.

CONSIDERATION XV.

Jesus Christ leaves the Supper-room.

"And a hymn being said, they went out unto Mount Olivet."
St. Matthew xxvi. 30.

First Point.

THE darkness of night had already enveloped the earth, and Judas had gone to the chief priests and ancients of the people to instruct them how they might capture his Divine Master. Far from wishing to avoid death, Jesus desired rather to hasten the hour of its approach, and, arising from the table, He resolved to leave the supper-room, and also the city, to prepare Himself in some solitary place for the great sacrifice of Calvary.

He, therefore, thanked the owner of the house for the courteous hospitality which had been tendered to Himself and His disciples, and, having sung a hymn of thanksgiving to the Eternal Father, Jesus, accompanied by the eleven, departed from the city. They passed out through the gate of Mount Sion, and descending the hill, proceeded to Mount Olivet. On the side of this mount was the Garden of Gethsemani, into which Jesus, when visiting Jerusalem, was accustomed to retire frequently to pray. To this garden He now repaired: "And a hymn being said, they went out unto Mount Olivet."

The reason why our Lord left the supper-room was, perhaps, this: He was desirous of saving His charitable host from the molestations to which the soldiery would certainly subject that person whom they should find en-

tertaining the very one whose capture they desired to effect. As to the Redeemer's reason for departing from Jerusalem, Theophylactus tells us that it was to prevent a tumult which would certainly arise among the people should they be permitted to witness the infamous method adopted to accomplish our Lord's capture. Several reasons are assigned for His repairing to Mount Olivet, and to that very spot where lay the Garden of Gethsemani. St. Jerome says that as Jesus was to ascend into heaven from the summit of this mountain, so He wished to watch, pray, and be captured on this mountain; thus clearly intimating that prayers, vigils, and humiliations are so many rungs of the mystic ladder of perfection, by which alone man can hope to ascend above the stars and reach his heavenly home. Venerable Bede tells us that the garden was the place where Jesus frequently retired at night to pray; and as this fact was well known to the Jews, and especially to Judas, who had often and often been His companion during those holy vigils, our Lord deemed that by seeking again the shades of Gethsemani He was choosing a spot most favorable to the success of His enemies' attempts to find and capture Him. Jesus wished all to perceive that He had no fears, and that, far from trying to avoid death, He went willingly forth to meet it. Others maintain that as the fall of the human race began in a garden, so Jesus wished that His sacred passion, which was destined to repair that fatal fall, should also begin in a garden.

For these and similar reasons Jesus joyfully advanced towards Mount Olivet, not as one going to meet death, but as one hastening to a banquet. But the more joyful Jesus was, the more sorrowful His apostles were. Convinced at last that this was, indeed, their Master's last night on earth, they walked along with bowed heads,

painfully brooding over the irreparable loss which they were about to sustain. Methinks, too, that on that lonely journey the apostles must have been vying with one another in the desire of drawing near to our Lord, and of offering Him words of sympathy and consolation. But such was their sorrow that no one dared to speak, and they pursued their way in silence. Jesus, however, did not remain silent, but availed Himself of these last moments to speak to His disciples words of most heavenly wisdom. These will furnish abundant matter for meditation under the second point of this consideration.

For the present let us pause a moment and bring up before our minds a vivid picture of our Lord and His apostles pursuing their lonely journey to Mount Olivet. Let us reflect that the apostles are not accompanying their Master now as they often accompanied Him in days past to some great city or castle, there to witness Him performing some wonderful miracle, or to hear Him preaching the word of eternal life. They are going with Him to the place of sacrifice. Let us in spirit join this holy company as they journey to Olivet. In this pious state of mind we shall experience abundant spiritual consolations, for Jesus will not fail to inspire us with holy affections and good resolutions.

Second Point.

The apostles, then, closing in lovingly around our Lord, were beginning to descend the hill of Sion, when Jesus thus addressed them: "My dear disciples, you are the tender branches of a rich vine; I am the rich vine to which you are united as branches. Now as the branch that is lopped from the vine soon withers and dies, so you, if you separate yourselves from Me, shall be able to perform no work worthy of eternal life. On the other

hand, as long as you shall observe My commands and remain united to Me in the bonds of faith and charity, so long shall My Father have you in His holy keeping and bestow on you all the treasures of His grace. But if you abandon Me, then also shall My Father abandon you. Remain steadfast, therefore, in the faith, and love one another as I have loved you.

"Behold, I now no longer call you servants, but friends; and I treat you as friends—intimate friends; for a servant knows not the affairs of his master, while I have admitted you to a knowledge of all those things which I have heard from My Father.

"You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and commissioned you to go forth and produce much fruit, and your fruit shall remain. The world, indeed, may persecute you; but let not your souls be sad on this account, but rejoice rather at seeing yourselves treated as I have been. As I have already told you, the servant is not greater than his master, nor the ambassador greater than the king that sends him. If I, then, who am the Lord of heaven and earth, and your Master, have been insulted, calumniated, spit upon; if I, your Master, shall soon be loaded with chains, led as a malefactor from court to court, there to be insulted, spit upon, derided, scourged, and finally nailed to a cross,—if I am so treated during My mortal life, you, who are My disciples, cannot expect better treatment.

"If you were of the world, the world would love you; but because you are My disciples it will hate and persecute you. But do not let your courage fail; fight on bravely with the arms of faith and patience, confiding in the strength of My grace and omnipotence. Remember that, though crucified, dead, and buried, I shall not cease to be what I am, the omnipotent God to whom all things are

subject and nothing is impossible. You, indeed, shall lament and weep because of these persecutions for My name's sake, while the world shall rejoice; but rest assured, My dear disciples, that your sorrows shall be turned into joy, and the world's joy shall be turned into sorrow.

"Lo, I have foretold you all things, that, when they shall happen, they may not surprise you nor make you waver in your faith. And I have yet many things to say to you, but your minds are not prepared to hear them. But when the Holy Spirit is come, He will teach you all truth, illuminating your minds and fully fitting you to discharge all the high duties of your sacred ministry. Do ye, meanwhile, prepare yourselves by fervent prayer and rigorous fasting for the reception of this Holy Spirit; and when you shall have received Him, you shall find yourselves changed, as it were, into other men. Such shall be the grace with which your souls shall abound, that you shall be able to do and suffer all things for the honor and glory of God."

Thus ended the discourse which Jesus delivered to His apostles as they moved on to Olivet. If we would profit by its sacred teachings, we should consider its every word as addressed to ourselves. Let us ever remember, then, that as long as we remain in union with God, so long He remains in union with us; "and if God be with us, who shall be against us?" If the world persecutes us, let us remember that it persecuted Christ also. Let us remember that if the world hates us, it is a sign that we are not of the world; and that not to be of the world is to be of the number of the elect. Finally, let us remember that if we only have a little patience our tears shall cease and our sorrow shall be turned into joy, according to the promise of Him whose words are eternal truth.

CONSIDERATION XVI.

Jesus Christ predicts the Flight of the Apostles and the Triple Denial of Peter.

"Behold, the hour cometh, and it is now come, that you shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."—*St. John* xvi. 32.

First Point.

JESUS was, meanwhile, drawing nearer and nearer to the Garden of Gethsemani. Knowing how short was the time that remained for Him to converse with His beloved disciples, He ceased not to instruct them, by both word and example, concerning those things which He deemed best adapted to promote their spiritual advancement. Therefore, He dwelt especially on the virtue of humility, on the propriety of always having a pious diffidence in one's own strength, and on the necessity of having recourse to God by means of prayer, especially in the hour of temptation. The Divine Master had often taught those same lessons, but the apostles, thus far, had derived but little or no profit from them. They had not yet received the Holy Ghost, and therefore, though instructed in the school of the Incarnate Wisdom, they were still only rude fishermen, ever attached to their own opinions and ambitious of worldly honors. They had not been reared amid the grandeur and riches of the world, yet they found it very difficult to submit to the

requirements of self-denial, the humility of the Gospel, and the doctrine of the cross. Thus on that very night when Jesus foretold how imminent was His passion, even while He was speaking to them on the subject of human frailty and urging them to have recourse to God for help, the apostles thought themselves unconquerable, and unanimously protested that they were willing to give up their lives for their Divine Master. On account of a fervor which was the happy effect of the Holy Communion which they had received that night, they thus rashly relied on themselves. But Jesus, who knew what was to happen in a few hours, said to them: "My dear disciples, you now follow Me and confess that I am the Son of God, because you have had strong evidences of My divinity in the numerous miracles which you have seen Me perform by My own power. You have seen Me give sight to the blind, restore health to the sick, make the lame walk, and raise the dead to life. But when you shall behold Me a prisoner, bound like a malefactor, dragged before judges, and afterwards condemned to a most disgraceful death, you will waver in your faith and be greatly scandalized in Me. Alas! not only will your faith waver, but you will abandon Me and leave Me in the hands of My bitter enemies. Yet I shall not be entirely forsaken, for My heavenly Father will be with Me; and assisted by Him, I shall have sufficient strength to suffer the ingratitude of your abandonment, the insults of My enemies, and the disgraceful and cruel death of the cross."

Venerable Bede tells us that Jesus thus predicted the flight of the disciples, not for the purpose of rebuking them for their weakness and infidelity, but in order that after the commission of the crime they should not despair

of His mercy, but immediately seek God again through penance. Therefore, to arouse more and more in His disciples' hearts this confidence in the mercy of God, Jesus added: "But after I shall be risen again, I will go before you into Galilee." This was equivalent to saying: "I shall be made to suffer a most cruel and unjust death; but when I shall have lain three days in the bosom of the earth, as Jonas was three days in the body of the whale, I shall raise Myself up gloriously from the grave, and, triumphant over death, I shall go before you into Galilee. There we will meet, and you shall then know how truthful are My predictions and My promises."

Every word of our Divine Saviour conveys an evidence of His love for us and gives us a lesson for the guidance of our lives. This twofold lesson of the necessity of diffidence in our own strength, and of boundless trust in the mercy of God, is taught us every day, either by the contents of some pious book that we read or by the words of some good sermon that we hear. Sometimes, alas! it is also taught us by the sad example of once most holy persons whose rash confidence in themselves precipitated them into the gravest disorders. From such unhappy cases we should learn to grow more and more humble. If, at times, we ourselves fall into those excesses which, on other occasions, we so loudly reprove in our neighbors, we should at once have recourse to God. He will not fail to extend His mercy to us, if we promise ever more to be faithful and sincerely ask pardon for our past offences. Before sin is committed, let us tremble at the thought of God's justice; after it is committed, let us take courage at the thought of His mercy, and immediately have recourse to our amiable Saviour. A contrite and humble heart Jesus will never despise.

Second Point.

These last admonitions of Jesus, instead of inducing the apostles to conceive a great diffidence in themselves, seemed only to confirm them the more in the good opinion which they entertained of their own strength. St. Peter, in particular, protested his fidelity with great emphasis, saying, "Although all shall be scandalized in Thee, I will never be scandalized." O Peter! Peter, instead of praying to thy Divine Master to confirm thy faith, dost thou dare presumptuously to promise that thou wilt never fail? And dost thou not perceive that thy indiscreet fervor, far from making thee more, only rendereth thee less acceptable in the eyes of God? Ah! far better for thee hadst thou cast thyself at thy Master's feet and implored the grace of remaining faithful.

But let us hearken to Jesus' reply: "Amen I say to thee, that in this night before the cock crow, thou wilt deny Me thrice." How did Peter act upon hearing this terrible prediction? Did he throw himself at his Master's feet to ask pardon for his presumption? Did he, at least, beg for the assistance of divine grace in the great danger which awaited him? Did he bewail his presumption in having believed himself to be better than the rest of his brethren, though he was soon to be proved the weakest of all? No; but, as St. Euthimius remarks, the more Jesus Christ affirmed that Peter would deny Him, the more obstinate Peter grew in his presumption. And again Peter passionately exclaimed, "Yea, though I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee."

This terrible presumption of Peter is surprising in one who had so long listened to the teachings of Christ; and it is not at all relieved, but, on the contrary, it appears more shocking from the fact that the other apostles shared

it; for the Scriptures tell us that they also protested their fidelity: "And in like manner said all the disciples" (St. Matt. xxvi. 35).

What happened to the apostles, and especially to St. Peter, on that very night is known to all, and it will furnish abundant matter for reflection in future considerations. However, in order to derive some spiritual profit from the present consideration, let us reflect that the apostles were so inflamed with love of Jesus Christ that they would not believe that they could become scandalized in him and abandon Him,—they who had seen so many miracles performed by Him; they who had been for three years under His teaching; they who had that very night received Communion from His sacred hands. Now, who among us will dare say that he loves God as ardently as the apostles loved their Master? And if they, notwithstanding all their love—a love a thousand times greater than ours—abandoned Jesus Christ even at the very beginning of His passion, what should we think of ourselves and of our own strength to resist temptation? Our Divine Lord Himself gives us the answer: "Without Me you can do nothing." He does not say that we can do something, however little; but He affirms that we can do nothing whatever without His grace. Let our love be ever so great and fervent, let our life be ever so austere, let our faith be ever so strong and lively, let our hope be ever so firm, let our charity be ever so ardent,—it is, and it always will be, true, that without the grace of God we can do nothing. Let us, therefore, be ever diffident of our own strength, always placing our confidence in God and shunning carefully every dangerous occasion of sin. Thus we may hope to obtain God's holy grace, without which we can do nothing towards attaining eternal life.

CONSIDERATION XVII.

Sadness of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemani.

"Then He saith to them: My soul is sorrowful even unto death: stay you here and watch with Me."—*St. Matt.* xxvi. 38.

First Point.

EAST of Jerusalem, between Mount Olivet and Mount Moria, lies the small but memorable valley of Josaphat, through which at the time of Jesus a little torrent flowed. Our Holy Redeemer was obliged to cross this valley and pass over the torrent to go to the Garden of Gethsemani, where He was accustomed to retire to pray for the salvation of mankind. This garden was situated on the side of Mount Olivet. It was a kind of park, one part of which was thickly planted with olive-trees, and the other part was laid out as a garden. No wall surrounded it, and it was freely accessible to all. Into this garden Jesus entered with His disciples, there to begin His fearful passion.

The Redeemer's countenance assumed a sad and thoughtful expression, and He said to His disciples, "Sit ye here while I go yonder and pray." As the apostles were taking their seats, Jesus turned to Peter, James, and John, and told them to follow Him. Then with bowed heads and in profound silence these three followed their sorrowful Master into the interior of the park, and towards the place where the trees were thickly planted.

"And taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to grow sorrowful and to be sad."

Origen alleges two reasons for the choice which Jesus made of those three disciples in preference to the others: first, that they might become convinced, once and forever, of their human weakness—a subject to which they were not accustomed to give any attention. For St. Peter, only a little while before, had said that, far from being capable of denying his Master, he would willingly give up his life for Him. St. John and St. James, also, but a few days before, had, with great presumption, protested that they were willing to drink of the bitter chalice prepared for Jesus. The Redeemer, therefore, wished those three disciples to be present at His mortal sadness, that they might learn from His example how great is human weakness and how little they should trust their transitory fervor. For if the Son of God at the approach of His painful passion became sad and found strength only by having recourse to God, how much more had the apostles need of prayer to obtain constancy and strength!

Origen's second reason for the Redeemer's choice is this: as Peter, James, and John had witnessed Jesus' glorious transfiguration on Mount Thabor, and had also received proofs of His omnipotence and divinity on the day when He raised the daughter of Jairus at Capharnaum, so Jesus wished them now to see how weak is humanity when not sustained by the divine hand.

As soon as Jesus found Himself in the company of His three chosen disciples and separated from the rest, He gave free vent to His feelings, and, sighing deeply, said: "Oh, if you could see My heart, you would find it immersed in a sea of sadness. I am as one cast out into the midst of the sea, and overwhelmed by the tempest; the sorrows

of death surround Me, and the torrents of iniquity trouble Me: 'My soul is sorrowful even unto death.'"

My most amiable Jesus, where are those happy days when Thou didst walk upon the waters as if upon the land? Where are those happy days when every one ran after Thee - the afflicted to be consoled, the infirm to be healed, the blind to be restored to sight, the leprous to be cleansed? Why, O my Jesus! why dost Thou seek no consolation for Thyself? Ah! it is because Thou art a most amiable Father, and Thou wishest to sacrifice Thyself for Thy beloved children.

Second Point.

The sacred expositors of the holy text assign various causes for the mortal agony suffered by our Redeemer in the Garden of Gethsemani. St. Jerome says that Jesus was not afflicted because of the imminence of the hour of His passion, since it was to undergo this passion that He had come into the world. But He suffered on account of the unhappy fate of Judas, on account of the scandal which the other apostles would receive, on account of the blindness and reprobation of the Jewish people, and on account of the destruction that was to come upon the unfortunate city of Jerusalem over which He had already shed tears.

St. Bernardine of Sienna tells us that Jesus was saddened principally because He foresaw that, notwithstanding His passion and death, many through their own fault would be deprived of the eternal glory of heaven.

Father Lewis Navarino says that the Saviour experienced fear, fright, and grief in order to alleviate those same feelings in us: for as, if He did not die, He would not subjugate death; so, if He did not experience fear,

fright, and grief, He would not mitigate those emotions in us.

St. Cyprian, looking at the subject from another point of view, exclaims: "Who shall not fear, if Jesus Himself was afraid? Who shall not tremble, if Jesus Himself trembled, before Whom every knee must bend? Who shall not be terrified at the approach of death, if the One who is the death of death and the terror of hell was Himself terrified at death's approach?"

St. Lawrence Justinian in his turn exclaims: "What do I behold, my beloved Lord? Art Thou sorrowful, and dost Thou really experience fear? Is He who is the very essence of joy now Himself become sorrowful? Does fortitude tremble? Does glory suffer tedium? Is splendor obscured? Is health become infirmity? Yet I see no armed men. I see no enemies approaching with swords and scourges. Why, therefore, dost Thou fear and tremble, O Lord? Thou art the great Captain of the Christian militia, and dost Thou tremble? Ah! I know the cause of Thy sorrow. Thou art suffering by anticipation, not simply for the corporal agony which Thou art about to endure, but Thou art suffering for all that the martyrs must undergo in the future. Thou art stoned with Stephen, crucified with Peter, flayed with Bartholomew, devoured by wild beasts with Ignatius. These are the true causes of Thy agony."

Finally, let us hear the words of the Seraphic Doctor, St. Bonaventure, who thus addresses his agonizing Saviour: "O my most amiable Jesus, these words of Thine cause me great surprise,—'My soul is sorrowful even unto death.' But why dost Thou fear? What is the cause of Thy sorrow? Is it because of Thy impending sufferings? Is it death which Thou fearest? But was it not

in order to die that Thou didst become man? For what reason didst Thou become incarnate in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, if not to destroy by Thy death our eternal death? What would it avail that Thou becamest man, were the grand object of the Redemption not to be accomplished? And if Thou didst not, O merciful Jesus, who shall satisfy for my sins? Did I not hear Thee say to Judas but a moment ago, 'That which thou dost, do quickly'? Then Thou wast impatient to meet death, and now dost Thou seek to avoid it? Ah! no; it is not so; Thou refusest not to consummate the great sacrifice. I believe rather, O Lord, that, being man, Thou wishest to subject Thyself to all the human passions, and, therefore, as man Thou fearest death, but as God Thou longest for death; and Thou art sorrowful because death seems too long in coming. Oh! the great love of God towards man! Oh! the great ingratitude of man towards God!"

Whatever may have been the cause of Jesus' mortal agony in the garden, it conveys to us a great lesson, one which will be especially profitable for us in times of affliction. Does the thought of death afflict us? The same thought also afflicted Jesus. Does the loss of some dear departed one embitter our remembrance? Jesus in the garden had to bear up against the bitter remembrance of the loss of Judas. Does the number of our sins terrify us? Jesus experienced the same terror. Do misfortunes and calamities grieve us? Jesus suffered the same grief.

But what did the Redeemer do in the midst of these sorrows? He had recourse to His Heavenly Father, and was relieved from them. Let us do likewise in our afflictions, and God will relieve us also.

CONSIDERATION XVIII.

Prayer of Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemani.

"Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."—*St. Matt.* xxvi. 39.

First Point.

ABOUT a stone's throw from the Garden of Gethsemani was a grotto hewn out of the solid rock. The light was admitted into this grotto through a hole in the roof. In this country a custom prevailed of building cisterns for the purpose of holding rain-water. This fact, together with the form of the grotto and the aperture in the top, leads to the inference that it was formerly used as a cistern from which the garden was watered. At the time of our Lord it was old and abandoned, and no longer capable of retaining water, but it afforded the loiterer in the garden a place of refuge in warm or rainy weather. This grotto, now converted into a little chapel, still exists. It is called the Grotto of Agony, on account of the agony and bloody sweat which our Divine Saviour suffered there.

Having manifested to His three disciples the profound sadness under which he was laboring, Jesus said to them, "Sit ye here, till I go yonder and pray." And He immediately retired into the grotto. The solitude of the place, the darkness of the night, the profound silence of

nature, and the imminence of the hour of His capture,—these were circumstances which combined to cause the Saviour to raise His voice in prayer to His Heavenly Father.

Before examining the prayer of Jesus, let us, according to the suggestion of Origen, consider that the Divine Master, in separating from the eight disciples, had simply said, "Sit ye here;" but to Peter, James, and John, who had witnessed His transfiguration on Mount Thabor and were, therefore, reputed stronger than the other apostles, He said, "Stay you here and watch with me;" which words are thus paraphrased by Cornelius à Lapide: "Stay ye here and look upon your Master in His agony, and see how He has recourse to His Eternal Father. Watch Me, that you may behold the intensity of My sufferings. See into what a state of extreme desolation I am cast, that you may learn how to act in your own future hours of sorrow. Finally, observe Me, and watch with Me, uniting your prayers with Mine, that thus you may give Me some little comfort in My sufferings." But Jesus did not receive even this small relief from His disciples.

Abandoned by men, our Lord then turned to His Eternal Father. The Seraphic Doctor, St. Bonaventure, puts these words on the lips of the agonizing Saviour: "The chalice of My passion is so filled with bitterness that I dare not press it to My lips. In spirit I see one of My dear disciples, who has sold Me to the chief priests, and advances now at the head of armed men who are coming to make Me prisoner. I see the hatred entertained against Me by the Jews, who are thirsting for My blood. I foresee all the persecutions which My beloved disciples will have to undergo for My sake. I foresee the desolation of My beloved Mother when she shall hear

of My capture and see Me crucified. I already see before Me all the sufferings which I shall have to undergo during the whole course of My bitter passion : and in the midst of all these persecutions and tortures My courage fails Me, so that I am forced to ask Thee to remove from Me this bitter chalice. Ah ! My Father, grant that without My death, death may be destroyed and sin wiped away. Let man at once be redeemed, let hell be conquered, and the gates of heaven opened : 'My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me ; nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.'"

Such was the prayer of Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemani ; a prayer short and simple, but which, notwithstanding its brevity and simplicity, conveys many wise lessons for our instruction. Let us, therefore, often meditate on these words : "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me ; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

Second Point.

Not only the words, but also the deeds of our Divine Lord should serve as a rule for the conduct of our lives, His every word and action conveying a salutary lesson for our guidance. Let us, therefore, consider the prayer which He made in the Garden of Olives, immediately after His agony.

But first we should reflect, according to the suggestion of a pious author, that experiencing grief does not imply imperfection, since it is only natural that human nature should bow under the weight of human infirmity. Secondly, we should understand that experiencing great grief at the loss of one's reputation is not necessarily an indication of imperfection, since it is in the maintenance

of reputation that man's real life chiefly consists. Thirdly, we should consider with the same pious author that fear, sorrow, and annoyance at the troubles and disappointments of this life do not constitute imperfection, since Jesus Christ, who was perfection itself, became sad, aye, and sorrowful even unto death, at the sight of the sufferings that He was to undergo. A Man-God became sad; and shall we, then, who are but dust and ashes, not be allowed to succumb?

It is only natural, therefore, to yield to grief. But to whom should we go in order to assuage it? Like Jesus, we should have recourse to our Heavenly Father, submitting our will to His, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

St. Dionysius Carthusianus, commenting on these words, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt," says: "Behold how humble, how sweet and affectionate is this prayer. It is, therefore, the very prayer that we should use in our hours of trial and affliction; because at such times we should humble ourselves before God, ask the graces of which we stand in need, and submit ourselves to His holy will."

St. Leo the Great says: "That word of our Head, 'Thy will be done,' is the salvation of the whole body. It is that word which has instructed all the faithful, inspired the love of all the holy confessors of the faith, crowned all the martyrs, and fortified all the virgins of the Church. Let all the faithful, therefore, learn this sublime and truly divine prayer, so that when they are in any adversity whatsoever, they may overcome it by submission to the holy will of God."

At the thought of the Man-God having recourse to

prayer, St. Lawrence Justinian exclaims: "O man! proud man, what dost thou do? Art thou stronger than was Christ? The agonizing Jesus has recourse to prayer, and thou, poor miserable sinner, presumest to suffer without deigning to invoke divine aid!"

The lesson which we should learn from Christ's example is this,—the necessity of prayer. But it is not sufficient to pray only in time of adversity; we should pray always, and pray with entire submission to the divine will. Let us expose to our dear Saviour all our wants and miseries; let us ask not only for salvation, but also for all the temporal blessings of which we may stand in need; let us ask Him for health and for preservation from all the accidents and dangers that surround our daily life. But let us ever make these requests in the spirit of the prayer of Jesus Christ, saying with Him, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

CONSIDERATION XIX.

The Mortal Agony of Jesus Christ.

"And being in agony, He prayed the more."—*St. Luke* xxii. 43.

First Point.

HAVING finished His prayer of wondrous fervor and resignation, and still experiencing no relief in answer to its devout recital, Jesus went out from the grotto to seek some solace for His afflicted spirit in the company of His beloved disciples. But here again He was doomed to disappointment; for, notwithstanding the fervent injunctions laid upon them to watch and pray in order not to fall into temptation, He found them asleep. He aroused and gently reproached them, saying, "What! could you not watch one hour with Me?" This was as if Jesus had said, "What! you cannot watch one hour with Me on this night so gloomy and dreadful for Me? Where now are all your promises of fidelity? You protested but a moment ago that you would willingly die with Me. Alas! if you could but know the terrible persecutions which menace us this night, you would not thus yield to sleep. Pray, therefore, that you enter not into temptation."

In order to mitigate in some measure the bitterness of this well-merited reproach, our Lord subjoined, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh weak;" which was equivalent to saying, "But do not lose courage, My be

loved disciples, for I know well how weak is human nature. The spirit indeed is willing, ready to make generous sacrifices, but the flesh is weak and yields easily to even the slightest temptations."

Saying this, Jesus returned to the grotto, and with increased fervor addressed His prayer again to the Eternal Father. But still no consolation came. Thereupon He sought His beloved disciples once more, and found them again asleep. Leaving them undisturbed, He returned to prayer. But that night the heavens had become as bronze to the prayers and supplications of Jesus. The divinity seemed to have gone out from Him, or rather it was present in Him only to increase the measure of His anguish, by causing the whole series of the sufferings of His passion to pass in dreadful review before His mind.

Thus He beheld all the outrages, insults, and torments which the Jews were at that moment preparing for Him. He saw the ropes and chains with which He was soon to be bound in that very garden. He felt the blows and saw the derision to which He was to be subjected in the court of Annas and Caiphas. He beheld the scourges and thorns ready to torture Him in the court of Pilate. He saw the ridicule and insults with which He was to be received in the court of Herod. He saw, too, there before Him the cross, the nails, the hammers, the vinegar and gall, which were to be instruments of His passion on Mount Golgotha. All the sins of the world, past, present, and future, rose up before Him, and He saw Himself loaded with their weight and standing as if guilty of them all in the presence of His Eternal Father. He saw how few would save their souls, and how many, notwithstanding all His sufferings, would be lost. He foresaw that one of His apostles would betray Him, that another

would deny Him, and that all would abandon Him. He foresaw all the pain, anguish, and affliction that were to come upon His dear Mother, till, overwhelmed at the sight of this dreadful array of suffering and torments, Jesus falls into a mortal agony. A death-like pallor overspreads His divine countenance. He is filled with anguish and terror; but still collecting His remaining strength, He pours forth to His Eternal Father the same prayer of love and resignation: "O my most loving Father, have pity on Thy Son! Ah, remove from My spirit the vision of all these horrible torments, and grant that I may not have to drink of this bitter chalice! But if this chalice may not pass away, but I must drink it, Thy will be done."

As Jesus uttered this prayer, His heart seemed to break within His bosom; the pores of His body opened, and blood oozed forth and came trickling down to the ground, falling so profusely that it soon formed a small stream which ran through the grotto: "And His sweat became as drops of blood trickling down upon the ground" (St. Luke xxii. 44).

Second Point.

St. Lawrence Justinian, contemplating the agony of Jesus in the garden, breaks out into the following apostrophe: "Draw near, O Christian soul, to thy agonizing Saviour; behold how deserving He is of all thy compassion. With the eyes of faith contemplate thy merciful Jesus, the King of heaven and earth, kneeling there in supplication, trembling, agonizing, sweating blood! Such a sight must surely win from thee the tribute of thy tears; for how canst thou restrain them on beholding thy God shedding for love of thee not only tears, but also

blood! Look upon the merciful Jesus, the Fountain of all good, prostrate on the ground, with pallor on His brow, His heart oppressed with anguish, His limbs bathed in blood,—and then let thy pity be excited, and groan and weep with Jesus in the sorrow of thy heart. Judge, O Christian soul, by Jesus' sweat of blood, how great must be His anguish and how horrible will be His passion! If, at the consideration of future sufferings, He agonizes, what will He not suffer when He will be crucified? If so great a sadness takes possession of Thee, O Jesus, at the very beginning of Thy passion, what shall be Thy emotions when Thou wilt be struck, insulted, scourged, crowned with thorns, cursed, blasphemed, and crucified?"

To Jesus, thus immersed in a sea of suffering and sorrow, the Eternal Father was pleased at last to send an angel from heaven to comfort and console Him: "And there appeared to Him an Angel from heaven strengthening Him."

It is the opinion of Dionysius Carthusianus and other pious contemplative writers that this angel was the Archangel Michael, prince of the heavenly hosts. The abovementioned writers put these words on the Archangel's lips: "Lord, Thou art now about to liberate mankind from the slavery of hell; the hour of Thy passion, so long announced by the prophets, so anxiously awaited by the souls of the just in Limbo, is at hand. Thou knowest that the redemption of mankind can be accomplished only by Thee. If, therefore, Thou hast this great work at heart, it is necessary for Thee to die the death that has been so long prophesied for Thee." Thus spoke the Archangel, to whom, according to Blessed Bernardine de Busto, Jesus made answer: "I desire the salvation of

man, and, therefore, I accept the most painful death of the cross." O incomparable love of Christ, which made Him choose death rather than see the human race condemned forever!

From this consideration we should learn how to pray. Father Lewis Navarino observes that the angel appeared to Jesus after His prayer,—not that our Lord needed the angel's assistance, He Himself being the consolation of all the afflicted, but that it should not appear that Jesus in His anguish had prayed to His Father in vain. Again, we are taught by the coming of the angel that we, too, should have recourse to prayer in all our necessities, having confidence that we shall certainly obtain relief, though, by a just decree of Heaven, our tribulations may not at once be removed. Let us ever keep before us the example of our Divine Master. His prayer was not granted immediately, but He persisted until an angel was sent from heaven to comfort Him. As the Eternal Father consoled Jesus, so also will He console us. "Ask and you shall receive," Jesus said to His disciples. Let us, therefore, ask with confidence, faith, and perseverance, and God will infallibly hear us.

CONSIDERATION XX.

Jesus is betrayed by Judas, and captured by the Soldiers.

"Judas, dost thou betray the Son of man with a kiss?"—*St. Luke* xxii. 48.

First Point.

COMFORTED by the Angel's visit, and feeling His strength renewed, Jesus went for the third time to His apostles. Again finding them asleep, He aroused them, saying reproachfully: "Sleep ye now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of sinners." Then resuming His usual sweetness of manner, He subjoined: "Rise, let us go: behold, he is at hand that will betray Me." Accompanied by Peter, James, and John, He then proceeded towards the spot where He had left the rest of His disciples. Here He halted to await the arrival of Judas the traitor, who approached with armed soldiery to arrest Him.

This wicked disciple, who knew well the place where Jesus was accustomed to pass whole nights in prayer, obtained from the chief priests a band of soldiers, armed with swords, clubs, and ropes, and also one of the servants of the chief priests; and, placing himself at their head, he led this wicked band, in the silence of the night, from the city of Jerusalem to the Garden of Gethsemani. Some carried torches and lanterns and went on before the multitude; but all were under the command of Judas, who, previous to leaving the city, had given them a sign

by which they might easily recognize Jesus. He said to them, "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is He: hold Him fast."

Thus equipped for the accomplishment of their nefarious designs, the enemies of Jesus approached Gethsemani. Through fear of being discovered they walked in profound silence, but the light of their lanterns and torches gleaming through the foliage of the olive-trees gave the signal of their arrival. Jesus and His disciples saw the lights, and soon caught the sounds of approaching footsteps; but instead of attempting to escape, they advanced to meet their enemies. When they had come face to face, Judas came forth from among his followers, threw his arms around his Master's neck, impressed a kiss upon His sacred brow, and said, "Hail, Rabbi!"

The Holy Fathers and other expositors of the sacred text, commenting on this terrible incident in the history of the betrayal of Jesus, express the greatest horror at the enormity of the crime.

St. Augustine among others, considering the manner in which it was perpetrated, is filled with a holy indignation, and exclaims: "O sacrilegious sign! by which war is begun under the appearance of peace. Perfidious apostle! dost thou not experience horror throughout thy soul at the thought of shedding the blood of the Just under the guise of friendship? Durst thou, under cover of a sign of affection, deal a cruel blow to the loving heart of Jesus? Durst thou deal a death blow under the false sign of peace? What iniquity! The servant betrays his Lord! the disciple sells his Master!"

But the loving Saviour, who still desired the conversion of Judas, even at the moment when that unhappy apostle was perpetrating his horrible crime, said to him, "Friend, whereto art thou come?" Then, in accents of paternal

reproof and loving entreaty. He subjoined, "Judas, dost thou betray the Son of man with a kiss?" which was as if Jesus had said: "What have I done to deserve such treatment from thee? Oh, return to My friendship and love! O child, return to the arms of thy loving Father! Think on what thou hast done! Repent of thy crime, and then give Me another kiss; but let that be a kiss of peace, of love, of repentance, and I will repay thee with a kiss of forgiveness. Fear not, O son of My mercy! Remember that I came down from heaven to save sinners. Remember the parable of the prodigal son, and know that I am that tender Father whose pleasure it ever is to welcome back the erring one. Come, O my son! Return to Me and receive the kiss of peace!"

Thus the loving Jesus spoke to the heart of the sacrilegious Judas, but in vain; for the devil had already taken possession of the traitor, and had secured his heart against every emotion but despair.

Let us ponder well the twofold excess which this consideration presents to our mind: the almost incredible iniquity of Judas on the one hand, and the ineffable love of Jesus Christ on the other. An apostle betrays his Divine Master with a kiss, and the Master calls him friend during the very moment that the horrible crime is being consummated.

Second Point.

Jesus, having now made the last effort to convert Judas, turned at once to the soldiers, and with a majesty befitting a God who has at His command all the elements of heaven and earth, He said to them, "Whom seek you?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Then Jesus said, "I am the one whom you seek;" and immediately, as if stricken by lightning, the men were hurled backwards

and fell to the ground, and the perfidious Judas fell also. Our Lord gave His captors this proof of His divinity and omnipotence, in order that they might have no excuse for their incredulity and hardness of heart in not recognizing Him as God. Again He asked them, "Whom seek ye?" and again they answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Then Jesus gave them power to arise, saying, "I have told you that I am He: if, therefore, you seek Me, let these go their way." The soldiers did not become better at the sight of such power and meekness combined; but they at once arose from the ground, and seizing upon the person of the Saviour, they began to heap upon Him the foulest insults and infamies, striking Him with their fists, spitting in His sacred face, tying Him with ropes, placing an iron chain around His neck, and then dragging Him about. In a word, they covered Him with every possible insult, till in a little while He stood among them "a Man of sorrows," as He had been foreseen in the vision of the prophet Isaias.

The apostles were present at the capture of their beloved Master, and being unable to bear the sight of His awful tortures, they said to Him, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" Meantime, Peter, the most resolute of them, without waiting for an answer, drew his sword from its scabbard, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. This man had, perhaps, treated Jesus with more cruelty than any of His companions. Nevertheless, this inconsiderate act of Peter keenly wounded the Master's heart; for the Saviour did not wish to defend Himself by returning injury for injury, but only by doing good. Therefore He immediately worked a miracle in favor of the wounded man by restoring him his ear. Then turning to Peter, He reproached him, saying, "Put

up again thy sword into its place; for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot ask My Father, and He will give Me presently more than twelve legions of Angels? How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that so it must be done?"

After these words addressed to Peter, Jesus turned to the soldiers who were holding Him, and, reproaching them for the manner in which they had accomplished His arrest, said to them: "You have come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs, to apprehend Me. I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and you laid not hands on Me." This was equivalent to saying: "I have lived among you; I have instructed you; I have performed miracles before you. Why did you not make Me prisoner on some previous occasion, when it was easily in your power to do so, rather than capture Me in the silence of the night, while I was praying to My Heavenly Father? Unhappy men, do you not see that nothing is unknown to Me, that I foresee all, that I dispose of all things according to My will, and that you cannot do anything without My permission? But now your hour is come: do, therefore, with Me whatever you wish, but dare not to touch one of My disciples; let them go forth unmolested."

Among the many points which this consideration offers for our pious meditation, we should particularly dwell on these: first, the meekness of Jesus when He reproached Peter for having had recourse to the sword; secondly, the charity and pity He showed by restoring Malchus' ear; thirdly, the love and fidelity He showed for His disciples by securing their safety and freedom.

The fruit to be derived from this consideration is a great and ever-increasing love for Jesus Christ, our meek, merciful, faithful, and loving Saviour.

CONSIDERATION XXI.

Jesus is abandoned by His Disciples and dragged through the Road of Capture.

"Then His disciples leaving Him, all fled away."—*St. Mark* xiv. 50.

First Point.

AMONG the many celebrated streets of Jerusalem and its suburbs, two are especially interesting, having been hallowed by the presence of the Son of God, not in the days of His glory, but in the days of His humiliation and sorrow, when, loaded with chains and covered with opprobrium, He was led out to Calvary.

The one is called the Way of Capture, the other the Way of Passion. The former commences at the Garden of Gethsemani, and leads to the palace of Annas, extending thence to that of Caiphas, and on to the tribunal of Pontius Pilate. Of the latter, which commences at the tribunal of Pontius Pilate and extends to Mount Calvary, we shall have occasion to speak when we shall contemplate and, in spirit, accompany Jesus to the place of sacrifice. But for the present let us consider the anguish and sufferings of Jesus Christ while in the first stage of His journey over the Way of Capture, from Gethsemani to the palace of Annas.

In the first place, it was not a slight torture for Jesus to see Himself abandoned by His disciples. Ac-

cording to St. Mark, the moment the apostles saw their Divine Master taken prisoner, they were overwhelmed with fear, and fled, leaving Jesus in the hands of His bitter enemies. Nor did they direct their flight towards Jerusalem or Bethania, where they could have warned the friends of their Master, and thus, perhaps, compass His rescue; but they ran through the valley of Siloch, and thence to the valley of the son of Ennon, where they took refuge in a cave. This cave, or grotto, which is still pointed out to the tourist, is hollowed out of the solid rock, and had probably been used before the time of the apostles as a sepulchre. In this dreary place they spent that night, and perhaps the whole of the following day.

On this occasion St. Peter showed himself less fearful, or rather more daring, than the other disciples. But how fatal was this daring to St. Peter! He did not run away, but followed his beloved Master from afar, "that he might see the end." The soldiers, meanwhile, fearing lest Jesus might escape from their hands, loaded Him with additional chains, according to a suggestion previously made by Judas; and, rejoicing over their brutal action, they redoubled their cruelties and pressed the Saviour to accelerate His pace.

A young man, perhaps the son of the gardener of Gethsemani, aroused from sleep by the noise, wrapped a sheet around him and rushed out to discover the cause of the disturbance. The soldiers saw him and pursued him; but just as they were in the act of capturing him, he threw off the sheet and, leaving it in their hands, fled away naked. From this incident we can judge how great was the confusion that prevailed during that night all along the Way of Capture. Some fled here and some

fled there, as the soldiers advanced with the Divine Captive. Every one feared for himself, but no one minded Jesus, who, like a gentle lamb, was led to the sacrifice.

No one can hope to describe the ill-treatment to which Jesus was subjected on that ever-memorable night. How many blows and rough pushes did He not receive from the soldiers? In the second point of this consideration we shall meditate upon those cruel injuries. But for the present let our attention be occupied by this one reflection,—the utter weakness of human nature when not assisted by the special grace of God.

The flight of the apostles contains a great lesson for us. How often had they not promised that they would never abandon their Master? Yet on the very first occasion of danger they leave Him alone with His enemies! How often do we not act similarly? How often do we not relapse into sins which only a short time before we had promised never again to commit? Let us, therefore, be always distrustful of our own strength, and let this holy distrust be the fruit of the present consideration.

Second Point.

After the flight of the apostles, Jesus stood alone and defenceless in the midst of the brutal soldiery. They dragged Him out of the garden, and, marching along the eastern border of the torrent of Cedron, they led Him through the valley of Josaphat, till they arrived at Absalom's monument. Here was a little bridge, over which, as many contemplatives teach, the soldiers passed, at the same time dragging Jesus through the torrent beneath by means of a rope tied around His neck. It was winter, and the shallow waters of the torrent were

very cold; the lacerated feet of Jesus became too numb to uphold Him longer, and He fell. It was to this fall—so the same contemplatives claim—that the Royal Psalmist alluded, when he said: "He shall drink of the torrent in the way: therefore shall He lift up the head." But the rocks that strewed the bed of Cedron, less hardened than the hearts of the soldiers, were softened, and, at the first touch of the Saviour's sacred body, became as molten wax and received the impress of His knee and elbow. One still may see in that very spot a stone which bears the impression of a man's knee. The fact that there is an indulgence attached to the stone seems to confirm the truth of this pious tradition of Jesus' fall in the torrent of Cedron.

Seeing that Jesus could not regain His feet, some of the soldiers prodded Him with their swords, while others pulled Him by the rope tied round His neck, till finally they dragged Him out of the water. Then they began the ascent of Mount Moria on the southern side where it joins Mount Sion. Only three hours had elapsed since Jesus, having left the supper-room, passed over that same road. But in that brief space of time what changes were wrought! Then He was accompanied by His beloved disciples: now He is surrounded by His executioners. Then He held sweet converse with His apostles about heavenly things: now He hears the horrible imprecations and blasphemies of the soldiery. Then He went to pray to His Eternal Father for the salvation of mankind: now He goes to consummate the sacrifice of the cross.

At last they came to the gate of the city; it was promptly opened by the guards, who had been already forewarned and stood in anxious waiting. The guards congratulated the soldiers upon their success in capturing

the "malefactor," as they blasphemously termed Jesus Christ.

From the location of the house of Annas it may be easily proved that Jesus was led into the city through the stercoraceous gate—that is, the gate through which the refuse and rubbish of the city was usually discharged. What a change! Only five days before Jesus had entered the city in triumph through the Golden Gate: now He is dragged in chains through the Gate Stercoraria!

The inhabitants of Jerusalem were aroused from their sleep by the noise of the soldiers and the crowd shouting their plaudits over the capture of the "great malefactor." Some looked from their windows as the crowd surged by; others hastened out of their houses, not, as on the day of His triumph, to pay homage to the Son of David, but to deride, mock, and taunt Him. They called Him an impostor and a seducer, and all were loud in their praises of the soldiers for the service they had rendered the Jewish people by making Him prisoner.

Such were the insults and imprecations that accompanied the patient Jesus on the Way of Capture. We cannot account for this frenzy of the Jewish people, unless we attribute it to the malignant suggestions of Satan, who vented his hatred of Jesus Christ through the voice of the maddened crowd. When criminals guilty of most heinous crimes at last fall into the hands of Justice, they awaken some degree of compassion even in the hearts of those whom they have injured. There is no heart so hard that it does not relent and soften on seeing them brought to capital punishment. But for Jesus there is no sense of humanity even in those whom He has so highly benefited. It was now the hour of the prince of darkness, as Christ had foretold His apostles: and the

prince of darkness used the rabble of Jerusalem as His instruments,—the same rabble that five days before applauded Jesus' triumphant entry into the city; the same rabble that had often witnessed and applauded His wondrous miracles.

Let us in spirit accompany Jesus along the Way of Capture; and if we cannot comfort Him, let us, at least, pity Him, fixing our attention on these three incidents of that memorable journey: His fall into the torrent of Cedron; His ascent of Moria like another Isaac; His entrance into Jerusalem through the gate called *Stercoraria.*

CONSIDERATION XXII.

Jesus is questioned by Annas and struck by a Servant.

"And when He had said these things, one of the servants standing by gave Jesus a blow, saying: Answerest Thou the high-priest so?"—*St. John* xviii. 22.

First Point.

OUR Holy Redeemer, loaded with chains, His ears deafened by the blasphemous shouts of the rabble, His limbs aching from the numberless kicks and blows that He had received, was at last led into the house of Annas. This house, situated on that side of Mount Sion which overlooked the temple, was not far from the stercoraceous gate.

Now, Annas was the father-in-law of Caiphas. He was a priest and also a member of the Sanhedrim, or council of seventy-two elders appointed to discuss the grand questions of the nation. Of the members of this malignant council, perhaps Annas was most eager in desiring the death of Jesus Christ. For this reason the soldiers preferred his tribunal to that of any other judge, and led the Saviour there; they also thought that they were paying Annas honor, and hoped to receive some recompense for the same.

This priest was a simple member of the Sanhedrim; and therefore had no right on his own private authority

to question any one, however guilty. But in the case of our Lord every trace of justice was to be trampled under foot. Annas, only too proud of the regard shown him by the soldiers, arrogated to himself the right of sitting alone in judgment, and at that unusual hour, and forthwith proceeded to question the supposed culprit concerning His doctrine and His disciples.

St. John Chrysostom observes that no guilt whatever being imputable to the conduct of Jesus Christ, the questions of the judge did not regard the person of the Saviour, but only the nature of His doctrines and the character of His disciples. Annas began to question Jesus thus: "What is Thy doctrine? Who are Thy disciples? Why hast Thou called them to follow Thee? What dost Thou teach them?" The mild Jesus meekly made answer: "I have spoken openly to the world: I have always taught in the synagogues and in the temple, whither all the Jews resort; and in secret I have spoken nothing. Why askest thou Me? ask them who have heard what I have spoken unto them: behold they know what things I have said."

This meek and humble reply of the Son of God aroused the anger of a servant of the high-priest; and this servant, though it was contrary to law for him to be present at such a trial, gave Jesus a terrible blow, saying, "Answerest Thou the high-priest so?" In dwelling upon this incident of the Saviour's passion, the expositors of the Holy Scriptures cannot contain their indignation, and unanimously condemn this servant's impious and barbaric act. St. Cyprian, full of horror, exclaims, "The Creator who, in His goodness, made man out of nothing, receives a blow from one of His creatures—a blow from the hand which He had made out of dust!" Says St. Ephraim,

"The heavens trembled; the angels were appalled, and covered their faces with their wings when they beheld a minister of iniquity strike the God of majesty." St. Augustine says, "If we consider who was the receiver of the blow, we will instinctively wish that the giver of it should be cast into flames or subjected to some other dreadful punishment; and, indeed, how terrible a punishment could not the all-powerful Creator have inflicted, had He not wished to give us a lesson of patience?" "O man!" exclaims St. Athanasius, "thou who thinkest it hard to bear patiently the wrongs done thee by thy fellow-man, imitate thy Lord, and reflect that if He, being God, allowed Himself, for love of thee, to be struck by a sinful man, surely thou shouldst bear with patience the injuries done thee by thy neighbor."

In order to draw some spiritual profit from this consideration, we should ponder well these sayings of the Holy Fathers, thus awakening in our hearts a lively horror of the great crime of the impious servant, and arousing in our minds an ardent admiration for the meekness and patience of Jesus Christ.

Second Point.

The insult which our Lord received in the house of Annas becomes more odious when we consider who that servant was that struck our Saviour. It is the opinion of many that he was Malchus, whose ear, cut off a short time before in the Garden of Gethsemani, had been miraculously restored by Jesus. This circumstance added a particular malice to the crime of that insolent servant, and Jesus was forced to assume the accents of reproach. This is the only instance in the course of the passion in

which our Saviour uttered a word of complaint: He bore in silence all the injustice of His judges, the perjury of the witnesses brought against Him, the barbarity of His scoffers, and the cruelty of His executioners. But His reproach in this case was directed with a view not to confound, but to correct and reform. Said Jesus, therefore, to the ingrate, "If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil: but if well, why strikest thou Me?"

"Great miracle," exclaims St. Ephraim, "to behold the meekness of the King of heaven and earth, who on being struck by a servant speaks to him with great kindness and reserve! The servant strikes, and the Master suffers it; the servant becomes furious, and the Master remains full of benignity."

St. Simon of Cassia says, "The Lord and Judge of all mortals invites one of His creatures to find testimony against Him, and submits His life, His words, and His doctrine to the examination of that creature who is at liberty to judge Him and pronounce sentence against Him."

Father Mathias Falier seeks to know why Jesus, while suffering with such admirable silence and patience all other injuries, resented this one; and he discovers five reasons for the Saviour's action. First, the Redeemer did not wish to remain under the imputation of having been disrespectful towards the high-priest, of which offence the insolent servant had accused Him. Our Lord had always respected authority and commanded His followers to give priests, who were not always exemplary characters, the tribute of constant veneration and obedience; and on this occasion He broke silence in order to give one more emphatic and supreme confirmation of His doctrine on the duty of respect for authority. Secondly,

Jesus answered for the purpose of correcting that insolent servant who had dared, in a public tribunal, to strike a man who had not yet been found guilty; though the ministers of justice were strictly forbidden to vent any private vengeance even on those who had been condemned. Thirdly, Jesus gave that answer in order to instruct the high-priest who should not have permitted so brutal an outrage, especially in his presence. Fourthly, the Saviour wished to show His equanimity; for if He had not answered, His silence would have been attributed to resentment; on the other hand, His answer bore testimony to the perfect composure of His mind, notwithstanding the terrible affront which He had just received. Finally, He answered in order to show that He acknowledged the just rights of authority, and was willing, in case He were declared guilty, to submit to punishment.

How many sublime lessons are to be learned from this consideration! How admirably it instructs us in our duty of bearing injuries with patience! However great the injuries which we receive from our neighbor, they cannot be compared with those inflicted on our Saviour. Besides, let us think of the infinite difference between Jesus and us. He was innocent, we are guilty. He was the Son of God, we are the children of sin. He was insulted by His own creature, we are injured by our fellow-beings. Jesus was struck by a hand which He had formed out of dust, we are injured by hands which had perhaps previously benefited us. How great, therefore, should be our confusion at the thought of our own want of patience in bearing with those injuries which God is sometimes pleased to have us receive for our own spiritual advantage!

It is true that Jesus answered: but what a difference

between His answer and ours! He answered to correct one who had done evil, we answer with indignation and passion. He submitted Himself to the judgment of His enemies, we refuse to submit to the judgment of even our superiors. He asked to know why He had been struck, we ask in order to shame and confound those who have offended us.

Let us, therefore, consider the difference that exists in this regard between our conduct and that of Jesus Christ, and resolve that by His life we shall henceforth model our own.

CONSIDERATION XXIII.

Jesus before the Tribunal of Caiphas.

"And Annas sent Him bound to Caiphas the high-priest."—*St. John* xviii. 24.

First Point.

ANNAS could not pronounce sentence because he had no authority. Therefore, having satisfied his enmity and, perhaps, breathed forth some of his long-entertained hatred for Jesus, he sent Him bound, that very night, to his son-in-law Caiphas, whose palace occupied a prominent position on the summit of Mount Sion, not far from the supper-room. Now, Caiphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the salvation of the nation. He was high-priest of the synagogue and president of the Sanhedrim; to him, therefore, was reserved the decision of all controversies in matters of religion. But before pronouncing sentence in important cases, he was accustomed to have them examined by the ancients of the people, who composed the Sanhedrim. These malicious men had already plotted with Judas to compass the death of Jesus. Having learned of Jesus' capture, they assembled in the house of the pontiff and anxiously awaited their victim's arrival. Here let us notice the hour of this assemblage, which, as some expositors say, was after midnight; but this did not concern the ancients. So bitterly did they

hate Jesus, that, regardless of their age and the dignity of their office, they hesitated not to spend the whole night in the prosecution of His trial in order the sooner to effect His condemnation.

The moment that Jesus was brought before them they were filled with an infernal joy. But, carefully concealing any external manifestation of their feelings, and wishing to maintain an appearance of equity, they proceeded to the trial, though in a manner as wicked and unjust as human depravity could well devise. They sought for false testimony against Him, that they might have a motive for sentencing Him to death. But notwithstanding all their efforts, they could find no one to accuse Him of even a fault. A few unfavorable words were uttered, but nothing could be concluded from them. At last two witnesses came forward and accused Him of having said that He could destroy the temple of God and in three days rebuild it. This stupid accusation seemed so important to the high-priest, that, arising from his seat and assuming a tone of grave authority, he said to Jesus, "Answerest Thou nothing to the things which these witness against Thee?" (St. Matt. xxvi. 62.) Jesus did not reply, but kept a dignified silence: "But Jesus held His peace" (St. Matt. xxvi. 63).

All the expositors of Scripture give grand explanations of Jesus' silence. St. Ambrose says, "He who needs no defence rightly keeps silence." Albertus Magnus adds that Jesus was silent because the accusations brought against Him involved no crime; hence He had no need to defend Himself, the judges themselves being evidently convinced of the falseness of the accusers, and of the falsity of their accusations. Dionysius Carthusianus adduces several other reasons for the silence of Jesus:

First, Jesus wished to leave us an admirable example of meekness and patience. Secondly, He was silent because the charges against Him were false, and, consequently, unworthy of reply. Thirdly, He was silent because He foresaw that if He should say anything, His enemies would avail themselves of it to devise new calumnies against Him. "From this silence," says Origen, "we should learn to despise false accusations, and to hold them as being unworthy of reply. For what need is there to vindicate ourselves from those things of which we have never been guilty, and from charges the falsity of which is acknowledged by the calumniators themselves?" Moreover, prudence teaches that it is far better to be silent than to speak without hope of good results, as was clearly the case with Jesus Christ before the court of Caiphas.

Let, therefore, a wise and holy silence be the fruit of this consideration.

Second Point.

The more persistently Jesus kept silence, the more fiercely the pontiff burned with an insane rage and a hellish desire of entrapping and convicting Him. Hence he attempted in every way to provoke the Saviour to give some answer upon which he might found His conviction and condemnation. The same thoughts and desires animated the ancients of the people, who composed the pontiff's diabolical council; and even the false witnesses were enraged at seeing themselves repulsed by Jesus' calm and dignified silence, which was a manifest and majestically disdainful refutation of all their malignant calumnies. At last, Caiphas, with a burst of insolent passion, exclaimed, "I adjure Thee by the living God,

that Thou tell us if Thou be the Christ, the Son of God" (Matt. xxvi. 63).

St. Jerome says: "Why, O impious priest! dost thou thus adjure Him? Is it in order to accuse Him, or is it in order to have grounds for believing in Him? If thou adjurest that thou mayest accuse Him, thou art already sufficiently condemned by His silence. If thou adjurest in order to be able to believe in Him, why dost thou not believe what He tells thee? O most iniquitous priest!"

Having been adjured in the name of His Eternal Father, Jesus thought it proper to answer, and gave utterance to those brief words, "Thou hast said it" (Matt. xxvi. 64). Then turning to all the members of the Sanhedrim, He said, "Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of the power of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven;" which was equivalent to saying, "Yes, I am, in truth, the Son of God, and you shall have to recognize Me as such when, at the end of the world, seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, I shall come to judge you."

At these words the ancients of the people stopped their ears, and the chief priest rent his garments in sign of horror, saying, "He hath blasphemed: what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard the blasphemy. What think you?" And they all answered, "He is guilty of death."

The moment that this unjust sentence was pronounced, the executioners rushed upon Jesus and loaded Him with insults and injuries. Some afflicted His sacred humanity by cruel blows; others insulted His divinity by their derision and blasphemy. They spit in His face, they struck Him, they obliged Him to sit down on the base of

a column, and, having blindfolded Him, said, "Prophesy unto us, O Christ; who is he that struck Thee?"

That celestial face, at sight of which the cherubim and seraphim bow down in reverence, was in a short time covered with disgusting spittle! That divine countenance, a glance from which the very elements were wont to obey, became an object of derision! That heavenly form, the sight of which, as Jesus hung agonizing on the cross, the sun itself could not withstand, became the laughing-stock of a vile rabble!

Notwithstanding all this, celestial rays still issued from the Saviour's countenance. "Hence the reason," says Father Lewis Navarino, "why the executioners blindfolded Him: they could not withstand the beauty of that face."

But we who daily see images of Jesus Christ,—His sacred head crowned with thorns; His face overspread with the pallor of death; His body bruised and covered with blood; His loving eyes dimmed and closing; His pale lips quivering in the throes of death, and breathing forth a prayer to God for our pardon,—how can we look on those images and memorials of our suffering Saviour, with coldness and indifference? Our indifference is ascribable to want of due reflection. We do not reflect that these images picture forth the sufferings of the Son of God, sufferings to which He subjected Himself for love of us.

Let us, therefore, meditate frequently on the sufferings of Jesus, and we shall learn to love Him in return for His boundless love for us.

CONSIDERATION XXIV.

The Triple Denial of Peter.

"Then he began to curse and to swear that he knew not the man. And immediately the cock crew."—*St. Matt.* xxvi. 74.

First Point.

THE prince of the apostles, firm in his resolution to accompany his beloved Master, followed Him along the Way of Capture as far as the palace of Annas, and thence to that of Caiphas. But when he attempted to enter the palace of the pontiff, he was repulsed by those stationed at the door, and neither supplications nor violence availed to secure him entrance. There was also another of Jesus' disciples among the throng. Some think he was St. John the Evangelist; others, and perhaps with greater reason, believe that he was a citizen of Jerusalem, who secretly followed the doctrines of Jesus, and who was well known to Peter and the pontiff. This man had free access to the palace of Caiphas; and on seeing Peter driven from the door, he spoke a few words to the maid-servant, who was portress of the place, and she immediately admitted the apostle. But noticing Peter's anxious and troubled features, her suspicions were aroused, and she said to him, "Art thou not also one of this man's disciples?" Without the least hesitation Peter answered, "I am not." Then he hastily brushed by the portress, so as not to be further questioned, and went towards the atrium, which he entered. In this apartment

were some of the high-priest's servants and ministers standing around a fire of coals warming themselves, for the night was cold. Peter advanced to the fire and was standing there warming himself when another maid-servant caught sight of him. Having, perhaps on some former occasion, seen him in the company of Jesus, she recognized him; and turning to those around her, she said, "This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth." All eyes were at once turned on Peter. Filled with fear, he denied his Master for the second time, confirming his denial with an oath: "And again he denied with an oath: That I know not the man" (St. Matt. xxvi. 72).

The fall of Peter should be a warning for all Christians. "What is man," says St. Augustine, "without the grace of God? What was St. Peter, the great prince of the apostles, when he allowed himself to deny his Master?" And then, seized with a spirit of holy fear, the same St. Augustine subjoins: "Behold, the firm column is violently shaken by the first blast of wind! Where now is that firmness and resolution that promised so much? Where now are all Peter's presumptuous promises? Behold, he who thought that he shared not the weakness of his brethren, denieth his Master and is overcome by the simple question of a poor maid-servant! O Peter, who was she that questioned thee, that thou shouldst so soon deny thy beloved Master? Surely it was not one in high position and authority, who could have criminated thee and brought thee into peril, hadst thou confessed to being a disciple of Jesus? The accuser was a poor maid-servant, a menial! And yet her accusation was sufficient to cause the fall of the prince of the apostles! Not, however, without a special dispensation of Providence," continues the holy doctor, "was Peter's

fall permitted. The one who was destined to forgive the sins of his brethren was permitted to be the first among them to fall, in order that, taught by his own experience to know the depths of human frailty, he might repress all harshness in the judgment of others, and become more compassionate and merciful towards sinners." "O Peter, Peter!" another pious author exclaims, "but a short time ago thou didst say, 'Though I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee.' Well, thou art not in danger of death; the Roman governor examineth thee not; the high priest questioneth thee not; the soldiers menace thee not: and why, then, hast thou lost courage at the simple question of a poor maid-servant? Alas! how vainly man presumeth on his own strength, and into what depths he falleth unless sustained by the grace of God!"

A woman caused Adam's fall in the terrestrial paradise; a woman caused the apostasy of Solomon, the wisest among men; and two servant-maids caused Peter to deny his Master. Now, if Adam, who was adorned with so many gifts of nature and of grace, fell; if Solomon, who was the wisest among men, apostatized; if Peter, who was the most fervent among the apostles, denied his Master,—should we not fear for ourselves, and should we dare expose ourselves willingly to occasions of sin?

Let us attentively meditate on this most important point,—the necessity of avoiding dangerous occasions,—a subject worthy of our deepest study.

Second Point.

Peter had denied his Master twice, when again he was recognized by another maid-servant, who said to those that were standing around the fire, "This man also was

with Jesus of Nazareth." Then the whole company joined in the accusation, and they said to Peter, "Surely thou also art one of them; for even thy speech doth discover thee." But Peter still continued firm in his denial, until a servant of the high priest and a kinsman of that Malchus whose ear was cut off in the Garden of Gethsemani said to him, "Did I not see thee in the garden with Him?" Then Peter, according to the words of the Gospel, "began to curse and to swear that he knew not the man. And immediately the cock crew." At that moment Peter recollected the words of the Master, "Before the cock crow thou wilt deny Me thrice;" and, filled with shame and remorse, he wept bitterly. Unlike Judas, Peter did not give himself up to despair; but corresponding to the impulses of divine grace, and placing all his confidence in the mercy of God, he glanced towards the corner where his Divine Master stood in chains. His glance was at once full of pity, sorrow, and intense remorse, and manifestly conveyed a supplication that Jesus might read in His disciple's heart all his utter confusion and sincere repentance. Jesus returned the glance with a look so full of pity, tenderness, and mercy, that Peter's heart was melted at the thought of the enormity of his crime, and of the ineffable goodness of the God whom he had so ignobly denied. Overwhelmed by the awful burden of his sorrow, confusion, and remorse, and deeming himself no longer worthy to remain in his Master's presence, he immediately went out from the pontiff's house—that house which to him had proved so fatal—"And going forth he wept bitterly."

The place where Peter, the prince of the apostles, retired to bewail his sin is still pointed out on Mount Sion; and some pious authors say that he remained in

that place all that night and during the next day, until his Divine Master had died upon the cross and atoned to the Eternal Father for His apostle's triple denial, and for all the sins of the world.

First, let us consider with St. Bernard how great is human frailty. For, if St. Peter, who was so much beloved and privileged by his Divine Master, could so grievously offend Him, how should we fear for ourselves, and how distrustful should we ever be of our own strength? Secondly, we should learn never to despair of our salvation, no matter how numerous may be our sins, no matter how grievous may be their nature; but ever to place our trust in the infinite mercy of God, as Peter did. He offended God most grievously, but trusted in the divine mercy, and thus not only regained the lost friendship of his Master, but was declared Prince of the Apostles, Vicar of Jesus Christ, and Universal Pastor of the faithful.

In the conversion of St. Peter we see verified the consoling truth that God has a special predilection for repentant sinners. This is well illustrated in the case of St. Peter, of St. Paul, of St. Mary Magdalene, and of many others. But let us remember that St. Peter washed away His sins by tears of sincere sorrow, one simple look from Jesus having been sufficient to bring him to repentance. Let us faithfully correspond to the impulses of divine grace, sorrowing truly over our past sins—not with a sorrow like that of Judas, but with a sorrow like that of Peter.

CONSIDERATION XXV.

Jesus passes His Last Night in Prison in the House of Caiphas.

"And they blindfolded Him, and smote His face. . . . And blaspheming, many other things they said against Him."—*St. Luke* xxii. 64, 65.

FIRST POINT.

THE night was far advanced; and the high-priests, the ancients of the people, the scribes and Pharisees, feeling secure in their possession of the person of Jesus Christ, and having unanimously declared Him guilty of death, because He had said He was the Son of God, left the place and retired to their respective homes. The formal announcement of the sentence of death was thus postponed until the following day; and the patient Saviour, meantime, was left in the power of the brutal soldiery. These vile men, following the promptings of their evil passions and the suggestions of the devil, were only too glad to avail themselves of this new opportunity to pour out on Jesus Christ the full malice and hatred of their iniquitous hearts. The Evangelists pass over in silence the insults, ignominies and torments which were impiously heaped upon Him during that last night in the palace of Caiphas. Not so, however, the expositors of the Holy Scripture, who, deducing their arguments from the words, "And blaspheming, many other things they said

against Him," dwell at length upon the sufferings of the Redeemer during that night of His imprisonment.

It is the opinion of Blessed Chembius of Spoleto that the Evangelists through very modesty refrained from mentioning all the horrors of the Saviour's prison, contenting themselves with revealing only what was sufficient to condemn forever the cruelty of the Jews, and to teach us the immensity of Jesus' love for us. Job gives in a few words all that the Evangelists pass over in silence, when, speaking in the person of Jesus Christ, he declares, "They are filled with my pains," that is to say, the enemies of Jesus insulted Him and injured Him, to the full extent of their power, or, in other words, their insults and injuries were limited only by the limitation of their power to insult and to injure—"They are filled with my pains" (Job xvi. 11).

And truly, if the Jews still tortured Jesus when He hung agonizing on the cross, after having inflicted so many sufferings and torments upon Him, how much more savagely must they have vented their hatred, when, on that night, they had Him in their power for the first time, with no one to witness their barbarity, and with the fear that the judges might yet decree His liberation!

St. Jerome, the most learned Doctor of the Church, affirms that the sufferings undergone by Jesus on that memorable night, and all the insults and injuries heaped upon Him by the soldiers, especially during the three hours before daybreak, shall not be fully known in this world until the day of judgment, when God Himself shall reveal the extent of their cruelty and barbarity.

O my loving Jesus! how horrible for Thee must have been that night, each hour of which brought Thee sufferings of every kind—sufferings of mind, and sufferings of

body. O my most amiable Saviour, how much Thou didst love mankind, that Thou wast willing, at such a cost of torment to Thyself, to redeem it! O cold human heart, how canst thou remain without compassion at the sight of these atrocious torments undergone by Jesus for love of thee and for thy salvation? For love of thee and for the remission of thy sins, He allowed Himself to be spit upon, to be struck, and to be made the laughing-stock of a vile rabble. O most amiable Saviour! grant me a change of heart, a sincere sorrow for all my sins, and an humble resignation to Thy divine will in all things; so that in all afflictions of spirit, with which it may please God to visit me, I may be able courageously to exclaim, "Since Jesus suffered so much for love of me, shall I not be willing to suffer something for love of Him?"

Second Point.

In the Church of the Most Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem is still preserved a broken column, called the "Column of the Flagellation," which is the object of pious veneration, not only to Catholics, but also to heretics and schismatics, who visit it day and night. This column must not be confounded with the one to which our Lord was fastened in the Pretorium of Pontius Pilate, by order of that unjust judge, the latter column being preserved and exposed for the veneration of the faithful in the Church of St. Praxedes in Rome.

But the column in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre well deserves the veneration it receives. For a pious tradition states that it formerly occupied a place in the court-yard of the palace of Caiphas, and that on the night of our Lord's imprisonment He was fastened to it and

scourged, this brutal action not being the result of any judicial sentence, but the spontaneous outcome of the ferocity of the soldiery. Though the story of this scourging is not taken from the evangelical text, yet it seems to receive some countenance from these words of St. Luke: "And the men that held Him, mocked Him, and struck Him." St. Matthew adds that they gave Jesus blows, and that they spit upon Him. From these circumstances several authors have inferred that Jesus was scourged, and so severely that there was not left a sound spot on His sacred body. Cornelius à Lapide, however, rejects this inference as being without sufficient Scriptural warrant, and without foundation in fact; nor do we venture to present it as being historically certain, but only as the pious opinion of some authors.

St. Bernard tells us that the soldiers, having tired themselves with insulting and tormenting the Saviour, tied His hands behind His back, blindfolded Him, threw Him insolently on the ground, and then dragged Him by His beard and the hair of His sacred head into a dark and horrible prison. This prison, situated in the cellar of Caiphas' house, was a dark, loathsome, and fetid sink. There the soldiers left Jesus for the rest of the night—truly a night of anguish and torments for the Son of God!

Let us go in spirit to that prison and contemplate its darkness and gloom, and the sufferings which the Redeemer underwent there in His sacred body, and the anguish of His most afflicted soul. The prison was a cellar, damp, dirty, and fetid, without light and without air, and had never before been used as a prison for any criminal, no matter how guilty. The sacred body of Jesus was black and blue from the blows it had received,

and some parts of it were lacerated. To the darkness of the prison there was added a still deeper darkness, induced by the bandage covering His eyes. Jesus' sacred hands had painfully struggled to His head to brush from His brow the matted and blood-stained hair, and to wipe from His face the disgusting spittle, and His hands were immediately tied behind His back. Thus bound and helpless, He was thrown on the ground amid all the filth of the place—thrown there like some foul thing to rot.

But if the sufferings of His sacred body were grievous, still more grievous were the afflictions of His desolate soul, which was all of Him that now remained free; but it was free only to intensify His torments. Before His mind rose up a vision of the past, the present, and the future; and in that threefold vision was nothing but anguish and torture. His capture in the Garden of Gethsemani, His betrayal by Judas, the flight of the apostles, the fall in the torrent of Cedron, the blow received in the house of Annas, and all the other insults and injuries received there—all these passed before His mind so rapidly that they seemed to constitute one single image. The present offered Him a view of all the horrors of His prison—its cold, damp floor, its drear, dark walls, and its insupportable stench, together with all the other horrors that surrounded Him. The future displayed the passion through which He was to pass on the morrow, and oppressed Him to such a degree that if His divinity had not sustained Him, His humanity would have succumbed under the weight of so much suffering, apprehension, and danger.

Who would not be moved to pity at seeing any man reduced so low, no matter how guilty he might be, even though he were a bitter enemy? Would not the feelings

of our common humanity awaken our compassion in such a case, and move us to pity the sad subject of so much misery?

But the sufferer whom we have been contemplating in that horrible prison—His hands bound behind His back, His face covered with blood and befouled with spittle, His body wounded and torn—is our loving and merciful Redeemer, paying the debt of our sins to His Eternal Father. Therefore let us excite in our hearts those pious affections which a God so despised deserves from us.

CONSIDERATION XXVI.

Jesus is condemned to Death by the whole Sanhedrim.

"And when morning was come, all the chief priests and ancients of the people took counsel against Jesus, that they might put Him to death."—*St. Matt.* xxvii. 1.

FIRST POINT.

AT last arrived the memorable day predicted by the prophets and so long and anxiously expected by the just, on which the Redemption of mankind was to be accomplished. It was a day of joy for both Jesus and His enemies: a day of joy for Jesus, because it was to put an end to His sufferings, give a beginning to His celestial kingdom, and place the seal of His death on human redemption, for which purpose He had come from heaven; a day of joy for his enemies, because it was to witness the accomplishment of all their evil designs and secret conspiracies. What a dreadful contrast! —Jesus wishes to die for His creatures, because He loves them; His creatures wish Him to die, because they hate Him.

Here, with Cornelius à Lapide, let us distinguish in Jesus Christ the *superior* and *inferior* faculties of His soul. Jesus certainly desired, and desired most ardently, the arrival of the hour in which He was to accomplish

the Redemption of mankind; but this joy dwelt only in the superior faculties of His soul. Recognizing by these faculties that it was God's will that He should die, His reason perfectly approved the divine decree, and His will perfectly conformed to it and eagerly desired its execution; but in the inferior faculties of His mind, through which He was susceptible of apprehension, fear, and disgust, He felt the full weight of His dolorous passion.

At break of day, the chief priests and ancients of the people, impatient to carry their infernal work into execution, gathered once more in the palace of Caiphas, having also invited the scribes and Pharisees—a vile sect with whom they could agree in only one thing, their common hatred of Jesus.

Before this iniquitous assembly, the Saviour was ordered to be brought; but as they wished to give some semblance of justice to their proceedings, they ordered that He should be brought in unfettered. They had no further recourse to false testimony, but questioned Him concerning His life and person, hoping to entrap Him in His answers and thus to be enabled formally and publicly to announce the sentence of death which they had already secretly decreed.

Let us pause to consider the malice of these judges. In the first place, St. Matthew says that they gathered together against Jesus; not to discuss His cause, not to examine whether He was really guilty of the crimes imputed to Him, not to hear His defence, but with the deliberate purpose of condemning Him to death: "Took counsel against Jesus, that they might put Him to death" (St. Matt. xxvii. 1). In the second place, they condemned Him, not because they wished to gain money, for instead of being paid, they themselves had paid out

money to Judas, to the soldiers, and to the populace; they condemned Him, not because the public security demanded His death, for they had feared that His arrest might cause a tumult, and for that reason they managed it with so much secrecy and precaution; they condemned Him, not because they had received any personal insult from Him, but simply because He had performed miracles, by which, together with His exemplary life, He had won for Himself the love of the people. This was the reason why they wished to rid themselves of Him; and, to attain their end, they affected great zeal for public justice. Under pretence that Jesus had violated its requirements, they resolved to try Him, endeavoring to invest the trial with some external formalities of legal procedure. In the third place, let us consider the many inconveniences to which they exposed themselves in order to accomplish their infamous designs. The Sanhedrim was composed of the ancients of the people, and it may well be presumed that some of them were advanced in years. Yet when our Lord was captured, their age did not hinder them from remaining up during the greater part of the night, their first examination of Jesus and the testimony of the false witnesses having consumed so long a time that it was very late when they retired to their homes. Notwithstanding all this, St. Matthew tells us, "When morning was come, all the chief priests and ancients of the people took counsel against Jesus, that they might put Him to death." It mattered not whether the morning was cold and damp; it mattered not that they had slept but little during the night: they wished to give vent to their hatred of Jesus Christ, and that was a sufficient reason to induce them to surmount every difficulty and to undertake any labor whatsoever.

Alas! how many imitate in this respect the conduct of the enemies of Jesus Christ. When called to the discharge of some Christian duty, they immediately find excuses under the head of regard for their dignity, or their health, or their reputation. But when there is question of satisfying their appetites and passions, or of indulging in illicit pleasures, then there is no longer any regard for their property, their dignity, their riches, or their health. Careless of their duties to God, such persons are very mindful of their duties to society and the world; negligent of their eternal salvation, they are careful concerning the care of the body; unconcerned about spiritual goods, they are very anxious about those which are purely temporal.

For our part, let us firmly resolve ever to hold in high esteem all spiritual goods, while despising those that are temporal, mortifying our body, practising works of mercy, and avoiding the vanities of the world.

Second Point.

Jesus was unfettered and led into the presence of His judges, who began a new series of questions. First of all, they said to Him, "If Thou be the Christ, tell us." Now, on a former occasion when these very defamers had seen the wondrous works wrought by His hands, and observed the multitudes that followed Him, they desired to know the secret of His strange power, and, gathering about Him one day in the temple, they besought Him to declare Himself, saying, "If Thou be the Christ, tell us." Jesus answered affirmatively, and His answer was treated as blasphemy, and Himself exposed to be stoned. Now that the same words were again addressed to Him, He

immediately recognized their purpose and the malice that prompted them. Wherefore He reproved those evil men, saying: "If I shall tell you, you will not believe Me. And if I shall also ask you, you will not answer Me, nor let Me go. But hereafter the Son of man shall be sitting on the right hand of the power of God."

No sooner had this answer been given than the judges, to turn it into ridicule, repeated in tones of irony and bitter mockery, "Art Thou, then, the Son of God?" To which Jesus answered, "You say that I am." By the ironical repetition of their question, the judges wished to reproach Jesus with His humble birth, His poverty, and His alleged crimes for which He had been brought before their tribunal. They might as well have said to Him: What! Thou the Son of God? Thou, the son of a poor carpenter, born in a stable at Bethlehem, the smallest and poorest of all places in Judea? What! Thou the Son of God? Thou, who hast been educated in a shop, and who hast often besought Thy bread from door to door? Thou who hast no home, no bed whereon to repose, and who hast often conversed with publicans and sinners, and who hast even been accused of being possessed by devils? Thou darest—Thou, a blasphemer and seducer —Thou darest call Thyself the Son of God?

Notwithstanding all the malice of this question, and all the hatred and mockery with which His enemies had invested it when they said, "Art Thou, then, the Son of God," He answered, "You say that I am." Hearing these words of the Saviour, the judges feigned an increased feeling of horror; some stopped their ears, others called on the Saviour to be silent. Then having consulted among themselves for a few moments, they said, in presence of all those assembled there, "What need we

any further testimony? For we ourselves have heard it from His own mouth."

They then, with unanimous voice, condemned Him to death, and resolved to send Him to Pontius Pilate in order to have the sentence ratified and executed.

Jesus Christ is condemned to death for having modestly and truthfully answered the questions put to Him. For having restored hearing to the deaf, sight to the blind, and life to the dead, He has to die the most cruel and barbarous death of the cross. Such is the usual reward which the world gives to those who attempt to reclaim it from its evil ways, who oppose its wicked maxims, and who show themselves to be true followers of the cross. But let all who are desirous of serving God still have confidence in His mercy, firmly believing that if, while on earth, they imitate the example of Jesus Christ, they will, in heaven, participate in His glory.

CONSIDERATION XXVII.

Jesus Christ is brought before Pontius Pilate.

"And the whole multitude of them rising up, led Him to Pilate."—*St. Luke* xxiii. 1.

First Point.

THE sun had already risen, and was spreading its beneficent rays far and wide over the plains of Judea, when, the sentence of death having been definitively pronounced, Jesus was again loaded with chains and dragged to the palace of Pontius Pilate.

Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea, to whom alone belonged the power, not only to execute the sentence of death, but also to judge whether those brought before his tribunal were deserving of such sentence. The members of the Sanhedrim, however, had arrogated to themselves the latter power, and they would, perhaps, have usurped the former, had they dared to do so; but being subject to the Roman governor, and anxious to have Jesus suffer death on the cross, a mode of execution unknown among the Jews, they brought Him before Pontius Pilate.

Here, with St. Bonaventure, let us consider how the soldiers effected this transfer of Jesus from one tribunal to another; a transfer which was characterized by the utmost cruelty and barbarity. Jesus was treated worse than if He had been the vilest malefactor. "Come," the

soldiers cried out to Him, "come with us, O thief, come to judgment! Thy witchcraft shall to-day have an end; now Thy wisdom shall appear, and Thy power shall be known." With these and other like blasphemous shouts resounding in His ears, Jesus is dragged along with all the appearance of a guilty man—He, the innocent Lamb of God.

It was published throughout the city during the night that Jesus had been apprehended, and that the Sanhedrim had been twice convoked and had justly condemned Him to death; consequently, a vast concourse of people assembled to witness His removal to the palace of Pilate. The chief priests, the leaders of Israel, and the ancients of the people, mingled with the crowds and conversed with them concerning Jesus, in order to incense them still more against Him. They also hoped that their presence, and that of the crowds that accompanied them, would strengthen the force of their accusations, and thus influence the Roman governor to ratify the sentence of death which they had pronounced against the Saviour.

Arriving at the gate of Pilate's palace, they halted, because, this being the place where criminals were condemned, these hypocrites feared that by entering they should contaminate themselves and become irregular and legally unclean and consequently unfit to offer sacrifice or participate in the solemnities of the approaching feast of the Pasch. So they delivered Jesus to the guards with orders to bring Him before Pilate and to request that official, in their name and that of the Jewish people, to deign to expedite the trial by ratifying at once the sentence of death already pronounced. They added that the affair was one of urgent importance, and for this reason they themselves had come to the palace, though,

acting in compliance with their own law, they dared not enter its portals.

Alas! how often is not a true picture of this odious hypocrisy of the priests and ancients of the people reproduced among us in the conduct of those persons who do not hesitate to commit the gravest sins, provided they can do so secretly, while they affect a most scrupulous care in all religious matters of minor and merely external observance? Behold, those impious Jews felt no remorse of conscience, when they condemned an innocent man to death, when they unjustly incensed the people against their benefactor, and when they accused Him of crimes which they knew He had never committed; but they affected to be very religious, nay, even scrupulous in points of legal observance. O impious and cruel men! how do you dare thus to deceive the people by your hypocrisy?

Let us now turn our attention from the Sanhedrim and take home the lesson to ourselves. We should ever remember that that God who scrutinizes our hearts judges us not according to appearances, but according to our dispositions. Man may be deceived, but God never. Let us, therefore, always endeavor to perform our actions without ostentation, and without any regard to the esteem of men, but for the love of Jesus.

Second Point.

Jesus was presented before the tribunal of Pontius Pilate. There before His judge He stood, modest and humble; and though brought as a malefactor, there was no mark of shame on His brow, nor did He show any sign of hatred or disdain towards those who accused Him.

Seeing these things, Pilate formed a favorable opinion of Him and seemed inclined to pronounce words of acquittal rather than those of condemnation. But, not knowing why Jesus had been brought before his tribunal, and wishing to comply with his duty as judge and also to accommodate himself to the delicate consciences of the chief priests and ancients of the people, Pilate resolved, since they would not come to him, to go out to them. Accordingly he did so, and said to them, "What accusation bring you against this man?" They became sullen and arrogantly answered, "If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him up to thee."

"Foolish men!" exclaimed St. Chrysostom, "O foolish men! why do you not tell what He has done? Why do you not name the crimes which you wish to allege against Him? Behold, here are the men who had condemned Jesus to death, declaring Him guilty of many crimes; and who, when suddenly summoned to bring forward their accusations, know not what to answer, and thus manifestly declare innocent the very one whom they had so wrongfully condemned."

Venerable Bede tells us that it was customary among the Jews to deliver up in irons to the Roman governor any one adjudged guilty of death, so that on seeing him, the judge might know the nature of the case and confirm the sentence against the criminal without further trial. But on the present occasion Pilate did not wish to conform to this custom, and therefore it was that he asked the Jews to bring reasons why he should ratify the sentence against Jesus. Irritated at their insolent answer, and wishing to humiliate them, he said, "Take Him you, and judge Him according to your law." But those malignant men longed to see Jesus on the cross, and so,

restraining their feelings, they had recourse to their affected piety, and rejoined, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death."

Here St. Leo the Great cries out, "By what law, O Jews, is it lawful to desire what is not lawful?" Meantime, Pilate insisted on knowing the reason why Jesus should be condemned. Whereupon they began to accuse Him, saying that He was a seducer of the people, that He had condemned the paying of tribute to Cæsar, and that He had made Himself king.

"O malicious and lying men!" exclaims St. Augustine, "go ask those who were once possessed by devils, and whom He freed from their cruel thrall; go ask the lepers whom He cleansed; go ask the blind to whom He restored sight; go ask the dead whom He raised to life,—and they all will answer that He is no seducer! Was it not He who taught to give to Cæsar what was Cæsar's, and to God what was God's? Did He not ever preach the duty of obedience to authority? Nay, did not He Himself pay tribute to Cæsar?"

On hearing those charges, Pontius Pilate went back into the hall, and calling Jesus, said, "Art Thou the king of the Jews?" Jesus asked, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or have others told it thee of Me?" Then Pilate, as if offended at this unexpected question, rejoined, "Am I a Jew? Thy own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee up to me: what hast Thou done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would certainly strive that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now My kingdom is not from hence." Surprised at these words, Pilate again addressed the Saviour, saying, "Art Thou a king then?" Jesus answered, "Thou sayest that

I am a king. For this was I born, and for this came I into the world, that I should give testimony to the truth: every one that is of the truth heareth My voice." "What is truth?" rejoined Pilate, and without waiting for an answer, he went to the Jews who still stood in anxious expectation at the door of the tribunal, and said to them, "I find no cause in Him."

Thus the truth ever triumphs over falsehood, and comes to be respected even by those who do not follow it. We must, therefore, never lose courage, when we are calumniated and oppressed, because the time will come when our detractors shall be confounded, and our innocence shall be revealed to all.

CONSIDERATION XXVIII.

Jesus Christ at the Tribunal of Herod.

"And Herod seeing Jesus, was very glad; for he was desirous of a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things of Him, and he hoped to see some sign wrought by Him."—*St. Luke* xxiii. 8.

FIRST POINT.

THE more the Jews endeavored to calumniate Jesus, the more innocent He appeared in the eyes of Pilate; wherefore it was that the latter again went out from the tribunal and frankly said to the chief priests and the multitude, "I find no cause in this man." Seeing their cause on the verge of being lost, the Jews redoubled their efforts to sustain it, inventing new calumnies, crying out continually, becoming tumultuous, and saying, "This is a man who, throughout all Judea, from Galilee to Jerusalem, has incited a spirit of revolt, everywhere preaching dangerous doctrines to the people. Is He not, therefore, guilty of high treason, and deserving of death?"

At the mention of the name of Galilee, the Roman governor gave a start of surprise, and, as if the name of that province had furnished him a new clue to enable him to arrive at a just judgment, he asked if Jesus were really of Galilee. Being answered affirmatively, he immediately said that Jesus was under the jurisdiction of Herod. Now, Herod was king and tetrarch of Galilee, but at that time he was sojourning in Jerusalem, where he occupied a palace, held court, and was surrounded by a retinue of soldiers.

Pontius Pilate was glad of the opportunity thus afforded him of ridding himself of the importunities of the Jews, and, at the same time, of saving himself from pronouncing an unjust sentence on one whom he believed to be innocent. Therefore, he gave orders to have Jesus taken before Herod, who, hearing the accusations, might condemn Him or acquit Him as he deemed proper. Pilate, without infringing on Herod's rights, could, indeed, have pronounced judgment, and under other circumstances would probably have done so, for just at that time he was on unfriendly terms with Herod; but under the circumstances he thought it better to sacrifice his self-love than to remain at variance with the Jews.

As Herod's palace was not more than three hundred and fifty paces distant from Pilate's, the journey was not a long one. Nevertheless, it was a very painful one for the Redeemer, as it obliged Him to pass through the midst of an excited populace, aroused to a high degree of fury against Him by the chief priests and the ancients, who, forgetful of their age and dignity, mingled with the crowds that followed the Saviour and urged them in every way to heap insults upon Him.

Herod did not receive Jesus with an air of malignity and scorn, as Annas and Caiphas had done; neither did he, like Pilate, assume the grave and majestic air of a judge: but he received Him in a pleased and courteous manner, for he had long desired to see Him and to converse with Him. Herod did not wish to treat with Jesus of the affairs of his soul, or of the business of his kingdom, and he did not wish to hear words of eternal life; but he hoped to see Him perform some miracle, for he had heard much of Christ's wondrous works, and looked upon Him as a skilful juggler or powerful magician.

A pious author, commenting on this passage of the Gospel, says: "Who ever looked upon Jesus and did not rejoice? Abraham had desired to see Him; he saw Him in spirit and was rejoiced. Simeon had also longed to see Him; he saw Him and was filled with exceeding joy. Zacheus had shown a great desire to see Him, and from the branches of a sycamore tree he beheld Him, and, touched by divine grace, he became assured of salvation. The Gentiles desired to behold Him; and it was given them to behold Him and to hear a voice from heaven saying, in answer to His prayer that His Father's name might be glorified, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' How often during His infancy had the afflicted and the unfortunate of Galilee—as was revealed to St. Bridget—said to one another, 'Let us go over and see the Son of Mary, for a look upon His face may bring us peace and consolation.' Finally, Herod saw Him, and he, too, rejoiced; but how different was his joy, and how vain! For, being deemed unworthy, he did not receive the favor he desired."

Second Point.

When Herod saw Jesus standing before him with downcast eyes, like a criminal who fears the rigors of justice, he assumed a most agreeable and insinuating manner, and, encouraging Him to be of good heart and to fear not, he began to question Him at length. "And he questioned Him in many words" (St. Luke xxiii. 9). On what subjects these questions turned, the Evangelists do not tell us. But many ascetic writers believe that Herod addressed Jesus somewhat after the following manner: "I have heard that Thou hast power to change water

into wine: wilt Thou let me witness a display of this wondrous power? Many have told me that Thou canst multiply bread, and I am very desirous of seeing Thee perform such a prodigy. I have also heard that Thou canst walk upon the water, and I wish to see so wondrous a performance." But Jesus answered nothing. "Why," says Theophylactus, "should Jesus answer him, him who did not question in order to learn?" Euthimius adds: "Jesus did not answer, because He knew well that Herod wished to see a prodigy; not to derive spiritual profit from it, but simply to satisfy his curiosity." St. Gregory the Great says that the Redeemer kept silence, because He deemed it better to be despised than to listen to praise from infidel lips.

Herod attributed our Saviour's silence to quite other causes, and thinking it was the result of fear, he still continued to question in a tone of great affability. He said, "Thou art, perhaps, the one whom my father sought so eagerly to put to death, and on whose account, in consequence, so many little children were slain? Thou art, perhaps, He that raised Lazarus to life; He whom so many disciples follow? Tell me, art Thou the man who is said to have performed miracles without number? But why dost Thou not perform some wonder in my presence, that I may believe in those that I did not see?" But Jesus answered nothing.

At last Herod knew that Jesus' silence did not spring from fear, but was the result of a settled purpose and an utter indifference to the questions asked. He, therefore, felt himself highly offended, and, in his wrath he would have perhaps at once condemned the Saviour to the most excruciating tortures, had he not feared that, by so doing, he would only lower his own dignity and give greater

publicity to the affront which he conceived had been given him by Jesus' disdainful silence. So dissembling his feelings, and restraining any manifestation of anger, he affected to treat our Lord as a madman, thinking that he could save his dignity better thus than by any violent expression of his wrath.

The chief priests, the ancients of the people, and the scribes and Pharisees perceived at once the change that had come over Herod. While they saw him treating Jesus with kindness, they feared to begin their accusations. But they knew that the Saviour, if admitted to be a madman, might escape the sentence of death; so they rose up, and began to give their reasons for bringing Him into court. They repeated all the calumnies which had been uttered against Jesus in Pilate's tribunal, and, adding a great many more, they strove in every way to establish His sanity, and to prove that He was certainly deserving of death. Though convinced of His sanity, Herod still affected to believe Him a madman, and openly mocked Him and treated Him as such. "And Herod with his army set Him at naught: and mocked Him, putting on Him a white garment, and sent Him back to Pilate" (St. Luke xxiii. 11).

We should learn from this consideration how to keep silence when confronted by those who injure, calumniate, or persecute us. If we keep a dignified silence in presence of such persons, we shall obtain, not only great merit before God, but we shall be esteemed wise and prudent men, and maintain our own peace of heart, which is so easily lost when we attempt to answer insults; and if we do not succeed by thus acting, in obtaining the conversion of our enemies, our silence will, at least, be to them a source of confusion and reproach.

CONSIDERATION XXIX.

Jesus is sent back to Pontius Pilate, and Barabbas is preferred before Him.

"They therefore being gathered together, Pilate said: Whom will you that I release to you, Barabbas, or Jesus that is called Christ?"—*St. Matt.* xxvii. 17.

First Point.

When Jesus left Herod's palace, clothed in a white garment, and surrounded by soldiers, the multitude began at once to cry out against Him, insulting, cursing, and blaspheming Him. Their wild cries were to Pilate the first announcement of the Redeemer's return; and in a few moments he again saw Jesus standing before his judgment-seat, but this time clothed in a white garment, mocked, and treated as a madman. Pilate at first thought that Herod had found Jesus guilty, and had sent Him back to have the sentence of death executed. On learning to the contrary, He again began to examine Jesus, no longer in private, but in the presence of all, the chief priests, the ancients of the people, and the scribes and Pharisees having been duly summoned to assist at the examination. But once more the trial resulted favorably for the accused, and Pilate pronounced sentence as follows:

"You have brought this Man before me, representing Him to be a blasphemer and seducer of the people, one who tried to withdraw them from allegiance to Cæsar. I privately questioned Him, and I have now examined

Him publicly in your presence; and yet I cannot find Him guilty of a crime deserving of death. Moreover, not wishing to trust entirely to my own judgment in this matter, as soon as I heard that He is a Galilean, I sent Him for examination to Herod, whose subject He is. You yourselves accompanied Him to the palace and brought against Him all the accusations that could lead to His condemnation. But neither did Herod find in Him any crimes deserving of capital punishment; nay, so far from considering Him a seducer of the people and one capable of exciting revolution, He adjudged Him insane and sent Him back to me without passing sentence of death upon Him. Wherefore I cannot do otherwise than declare Him innocent. However, in order to accommodate myself in some measure to your desires, I will have Him punished for those imprudences which He may have accidentally committed, and then I will release Him." "I will chastise Him therefore and release Him" (St. Luke xxiii. 16).

This sentence of Pontius Pilate, which condemned the innocent Jesus, simply to please those who calumniated Him, was more than unjust and impious; and yet it did not satisfy the Jews, but only made them more eager to invent new calumnies against Jesus that they might obtain the gratification of their desire of seeing Him on the cross.

The chief priests and the ancients renewed their accusations, but Jesus made them no answer. "And the chief priests accused Him in many things" (St. Mark xv. 3). "And when He was accused by the chief priests and ancients, He answered nothing" (St. Matt. xxvii. 12). He who had modestly answered Pontius Pilate did not deign to give one word in answer to the chief priests and

ancients of the people. He answered Pilate, because he had questioned to learn the truth; He answered not the chief priests and ancients, because they knew Him to be innocent, yet they accused Him of being guilty. They, therefore, did not deserve an answer, for those never deserve any answer who attempt to contradict the truth.

Let us consider our Lord in this threefold position: first, as exposed to the insults and outrages of the Jewish people; secondly, as declared innocent by Pilate, yet condemned to undergo chastisement; thirdly, as condemned, though innocent, by the chief priests and ancients, Jesus meanwhile answering nothing.

When we find ourselves in a similar situation, insulted, and condemned to suffer innocently, let us remember the beautiful evangelical teaching, that in order to live piously in Christ we must be willing to suffer persecution.

Second Point.

While the Jews, fearing that Jesus would be acquitted, trembled with rage and gnashed their teeth, Pilate remembered a stipulation which existed between the Jews and Romans, and which provided that, on the feast of the Pasch, the Jews might obtain the release of any one criminal under capital sentence. Taking advantage of this provision of the law, Pilate thought to save Jesus at the request of the Jews themselves. For he wished to save Jesus if not on the ground of innocence, at least on the ground of a favor granted Him.

Now, a great malefactor named Barabbas was at that time in prison. Besides being a notorious robber, this man had been a leader in an insurrection against the government, and in a tumult had killed a man. For this crime he had been condemned to death, and his execu-

tion was expected from day to day. On account of his numerous crimes Barabbas was justly deemed a dangerous member of society, and all were consequently anxious for his execution. Pilate felt almost certain that the Jews would never prefer Barabbas before Jesus; so he said to them, "Whom will you that I release to you, Barabbas, or Jesus that is called Christ?"

For a time the Jewish people wavered in their choice; perhaps many among them shuddered with horror at this impious proposal of the judge. For though they were incensed against Jesus, and, as it were, blinded by the wicked and false insinuations of their leaders, yet their aversion to Barabbas was so great that few could ask for the liberation of a man who was hated by the whole nation as an infamous robber, a seditious and violent person, and a murderer.

But the chief priests and members of the Sanhedrim hastened here and there among the people, eagerly urging them to call for the release of Barabbas. They were deceived by their unscrupulous leaders, and, after a confused murmur which agitated the whole multitude, they gave vent to this awful cry: "Away with this Man, and release unto us Barabbas."

"O insane rage!" exclaims St. Augustine, "which dictates the release of Barabbas rather than of Jesus; which commands the execution of Him who raises the dead to life, and the liberation of a robber that he may with impunity go forth to put the living to death.

Origen observes that if the Jews had only asked for the release of Barabbas without asking for the execution of Jesus, it would have been a great impiety; for it would seem that while they were not concerned about a just man grossly calumniated, they were solicitous to save a guilty man convicted of murder. But to ask for

the release of a robber and murderer, and at the same time to demand clamorously the crucifixion of the Just—what words are adequate to express the enormity of such a crime! This horrible crime becomes more horrible when we consider who this just Man was, before whom Barabbas was preferred. His very name was so venerable, and resounded so sweetly upon the ear, that the Jews themselves dared not pronounce it, but said, "Away with *this Man*." Yes, Barabbas was preferred before Jesus—Jesus, who is the Son of God, consubstantial with the Eternal Father, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Redeemer of mankind, the long-desired Messias, the Consoler of the afflicted, the Helper of the helpless and the poor,—in a word, Jesus, who was the tender Father and amiable Brother of that ungrateful people, saw Barabbas preferred before Him.

O my most amiable Saviour! to how many humiliations and grievances wast Thou not subjected! A disciple betrayed Thee with a kiss; a servant who had received a signal favor at Thy hands dared deal Thy sacred face a blow; the soldiers spit in Thy face; the priests called Thee a blasphemer; the pontiff judged Thee guilty of death; Herod mocked Thee as a fool; Pilate declared Thee innocent, and forthwith ordered Thee to be scourged; and the people prefer Barabbas before Thee. Shall not I, then, who glory to be called Thy disciple, Thy servant, be willing to bear patiently for Thy love a trifling offence, an insulting word? Shall I not be patient when others are preferred before me, and myself but little considered? O Jesus! humble my pride: grant me the grace to know my own nothingness, and in all the adversities of this life constantly to imitate Thee in the practice of patience, humility, and resignation.

CONSIDERATION XXX.

The People continue to ask the Deliverance of Barabbas and the Death of Jesus.

"Pilate saith to them: What shall I do, then, with Jesus that is called Christ? They say all: Let Him be crucified."—*St. Matt.* xxvii. 22.

FIRST POINT.

AMAZED at hearing the Jews openly declare themselves in favor of Barabbas, Pilate again made a faint attempt to champion the cause of Jesus, and turning to the crowd, said, in reproachful tones, "You have requested the release of Barabbas, and I grant it; but what shall I do with Jesus that is called Christ?" This was as if Pilate had said: "Since you are not ashamed to ask for the release of a robber and an assassin, what do you wish me to do with this just and generous Man, who is called the Anointed of the Lord, the King of the Jews?" But the more Pilate attempted to favor Jesus, the more enraged the Jews became, and cried out with a loud voice, "Let Him be crucified, let Him be crucified."

Pilate's amazement grew into anger as he witnessed how the Jews, who a few moments before had so shamelessly declared in favor of Barabbas, were still persisting in their demands for the Saviour's condemnation, and he, therefore, again turned to them and said, "Why, what evil hath He done? I find no cause in Him." But in vain Pilate tried to direct their minds towards a course

of justice; they grew more persistent, and cried still louder for the Redeemer's death: "But they cried out the more, saying: Let Him be crucified."

"Only six days before," observes a pious author, "this same people cried out, 'Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna to the Son of David! Glory and honor to Him!' And now they cry, 'Let Him be crucified, let Him be crucified!'" During those six days Jesus had unceasingly preached His heavenly doctrine to that same people. What crime did He commit, that they now cry out, "Let Him be crucified"?

But it is useless to seek to discover the motives of men actuated by passion, and no longer under the restraint of their conscience. Let us, therefore, turn our thoughts to ourselves, and apply the meaning of this evangelical passage to our own souls. Do not we, too, often offend God, and thus prefer Barabbas to Jesus? Nay, when we commit sin, do we not prefer the very dirt to Jesus? The impulses of grace never cease to touch our hearts, even when we are most violently tempted by the world, the flesh, and the devil. At such a moment there goes on within us a conflict like that which took place before the tribunal of Pilate. At such a moment we have a choice to make; we have to choose between the state of grace and the state of sin, between God and Satan, between our own peace of mind and the slavery of hell. For grace and sin, God and Satan, peace of conscience and slavery to sin, cannot exist together in the same soul. Either God or Satan must depart, and we have to choose between them: "Whom will you that I release to you, Barabbas, or Jesus that is called Christ?"

In the hour of temptation, before making our choice, we should reflect on what is proposed to us: heaven on

the one hand, hell on the other; God offers His grace and favor, the devil offers slavery and torments. Let us also reflect on the peace of soul which we invariably enjoy as long as we remain in the state of grace, and on the remorse and agitation of mind which those suffer who are so unfortunate as to fall into sin.

If, in the hour of temptation, we make those wise reflections, we shall chôose better than did the Jews, and thus triumph over our common enemy. A firm resolution to do so should be the fruit of this consideration.

Second Point.

Seeing himself deceived in his expectations of liberating Jesus, and fearing, perhaps, a popular uprising, Pilate dared no longer persist in his course and forthwith released Barabbas. But while yielding to the seditious importunities of the Jews, he was not without experiencing great agitation of mind; for, during the progress of the trial his wife sent him a message saying, "Have thou nothing to do with this just Man. For I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him." This advice served to increase his mental agitation, yet he did not resolve to adhere firmly to the side of justice. However, he did glorify the truth, for he confessed that he condemned the innocent. This confession he made publicly; he ordered his servants to bring water to him, and, washing his hands in the presence of all, said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Man: look ye to it,"—as if the washing of his hands and his protestation against the violence of the Jews could excuse the manifest injustice of his action in allowing the condemnation of an innocent man. In answer to Pilate the Jews cried out

with a loud voice, "His blood be upon us and upon our children."

This horrible imprecation, which has been so completely and severely fulfilled, did not remove all doubts and remorse from Pilate's mind, yet it served in a measure to moderate his fears and regrets. But the more Pilate was convinced of the innocence of Jesus and the malignity of the Jews, the more guilty he was before God and the tribunal of his own conscience. It availed him not to declare that Jesus was innocent and just; still less did it avail him to wash his hands before the people: because, as Eusebius Emissenus declares, the Roman governor became guilty of the death of Jesus by judicially delivering Him into the hands of those who wished to condemn Him unjustly.

We should not, however, dwell too much on the injustice of Pilate, but rather on the madness of the Jews, and on the imprecation which they pronounced against themselves, the horror of both of which is so great as to be incapable of expression, or even of conception. And yet if we compare ourselves with the Jews, we shall find that we are even more guilty than they. It is certain that they did not know either what they were saying or what they were doing, because they were deceived by their leaders, the chief priests and ancients of the people, and finally believed that Jesus Christ was deserving of death. Neither did they recognize Him as the Son of God; for if they had recognized Him as such, certainly, as St. Paul says, they would not have crucified Him. But we are children of the Church; we are illumined by the splendor of the Gospel; we confess Jesus Christ to be true God and true man; we believe in His real presence in the Holy Eucharist; instead of being instigated

by our priests to hate and reject Him, we are earnestly invited to love and venerate Him; we firmly believe that that God whom we offend knows our most secret thoughts, and rewards or punishes us according to our works,—we believe all these things, and yet we dare offend Him, and even grievously, and dare remain in the state of mortal sin with the greatest indifference. We should not, therefore, so much wonder at this action of the Jews, who did not recognize Jesus as God, but who, on the contrary, believed Him deserving of death.

Let us deplore our ingratitude from the bottom of our hearts, and ask pardon for having, notwithstanding all our graces and the teachings of our Church, so often offended against our belief.

CONSIDERATION XXXI.

Jesus is scourged at the Pillar.

"Then therefore Pilate took Jesus, and scourged Him."—*St. John* xix. 1.

FIRST POINT.

THE passion of Jesus Christ was most bitter in all its stages, but the excess of that bitterness can be realized only by those who meditate profoundly on its particular incidents, among which there are few more touching than that of the scourging at the pillar. Nevertheless, the Evangelists pass over in silence all the impious circumstances connected with it, and the barbarity of the manner of its execution, and content themselves with saying that Pilate, seeing that he could not convince the Jews of Jesus' innocence, caused Him to be scourged, hoping that this cruel spectacle might, perhaps, move them to compassion. "Then therefore Pilate took Jesus, and scourged Him."

The Evangelists also relate the crowning of our Saviour with thorns, and the crucifixion, two most painful events in the passion, with the same simplicity and conciseness, leaving it to the piety of the Christian to realize the atrocity of the Saviour's sufferings.

On the other hand, all the holy Fathers, and ascetic writers generally, express the greatest horror at the cruelties perpetrated against our Lord during this dreadful

scourging. Some invoke the angels, begging them to descend from heaven to cover the naked form of their Divine Master exposed to the lash; others inveigh against the impious judge who condemned to so cruel a torture a Man whom a little while before he had pronounced innocent of all crime; others apostrophize the cruel executioners, praying them to spare their patient Victim and their Benefactor; other writers dwell on the sufferings of the Mother of Jesus, who was present during the terrible scene; others assert that the sufferings undergone by the Saviour at the pillar were a punishment of mankind's sins of sensuality,—while all agree in stating that the scourging of our Saviour at the pillar was one of the most cruel and barbarous incidents of His extremely bitter passion. Let us endeavor to bring up before our minds a lively picture of this sanguinary tragedy in order to awaken in our hearts a deep sense of compassion for the sufferings of our Reedemer.

There was an atrium, or court-yard, at the entrance of Pilate's tribunal, and in this court-yard stood a marble column, rising only a few spans above the ground. A criminal condemned to be scourged was bound to this column by means of ropes passed around the lower portion of his body, his hands were tied behind his back, and more than half his person was exposed to the lash.

Scourging was an infamous torture inflicted only on slaves condemned to capital punishment, and was considered so atrocious that the Jews, a civilized people, or at least a people less barbarous than their contemporaries, in the infliction of this punishment were limited by law to thirty-nine lashes. Among the Romans, a cruel and sanguinary people, there was no limit assigned, but the

number of lashes to be inflicted was regulated by the cruelty or humanity of the judge, and sometimes the matter was left entirely to the discretion of the executioner.

Jesus, therefore, having been condemned to be scourged, was dragged by the executioners to the court-yard of the tribunal, where a great crowd had assembled to witness the inhuman spectacle. Arrived on the ground, Jesus divested Himself of His robes, including the white garment which Herod had put on Him, and His own proper vesture. Then without any compulsion—as was revealed to St. Bridget—He presented His hands to the executioners, to have them tied, and offered Himself to be fastened to the pillar.

When Jesus had been securely bound to the pillar, the executioners armed themselves with thorny switches, heavy thongs, knotted ropes, iron chains, and other implements suggested to them by their diabolical malice, and the inhuman and impious work began. According to St. Jerome, the executioners were six in number; but according to what was revealed to St. Mary Magdalene, there were as many as thirty, and they divided their inhuman labor among them, so that when one became tired another took his place. Now, if the executioners became tired, what must have been the intensity of the suffering of their victim! Though authors differ as to the number of stripes received by our Lord, all compute them to have amounted to several thousand, and St. Bonaventure places their number at five thousand. Who, then, can conceive the amount of torture inflicted on our Lord? At every blow a fresh cut is made in that delicate body, until it is covered with wounds and pieces of bleeding flesh fall to the ground. In fact, many authors claim that our Lord

was so cruelly scourged that His bones could be numbered.

Let us meditate on this cruel scourging of our Redeemer and excite in our hearts a deep sorrow for our sins.

Second Point.

In order to form a faint idea of the nature of this terrible scourging, let us imagine that we, together with a great multitude, are present as an ordinary man, a stranger, who has committed some great crime, is led out, fastened to a pillar, and subjected to this cruel punishment.

Behold! the executioners arm themselves with thorny rods, heavy thongs, and other instruments of torture, and the bloody work begins. They shower down blows upon their helpless victim until great ridges of bruised and bleeding flesh are formed on his breast, shoulders, hands, arms, and other parts of his body, which soon becomes one bleeding mass; and finally the flesh of the poor victim is torn open with hooks of iron, till his bones can be numbered. Who could witness such a spectacle and remain unmoved? Nay, who would not feel his heart swell with compassion for a poor, unhappy creature like the one whose sufferings we have described, even though the unfortunate wretch were the greatest of criminals or the bitterest of enemies?

But if a torture so cruel and barbarous inflicted on a mere man moves us to compassion, shall we experience no such emotion at the remembrance of its infliction upon the sacred body of Jesus Christ, who suffered all this, and still more, for love of us and for our salvation? "O man!" cries St. Augustine, "learn how much thou hast

cost, and how much thou dost owe thy Redeemer. Thou hast cost the life of a God, and thou dost owe thy life to Him. Behold, He is scourged for thee—He who is Holiness itself! The Holy One of God is scourged for the unholy and impious!"

"Draw near," exclaims St. Ephraim, "all you that have been redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb of God, and consider how our merciful Redeemer permitted Himself to be betrayed, struck, spit upon, derided, and scourged for us miserable sinners who have truly deserved such tortures in punishment of our sins."

Meanwhile the executioners, urged on by the cruel Jews who at the sight of blood had grown more ferocious than tigers and promised to reward the scourgers according to the degree of their barbarity, bent to their brutal work with ever-increasing fury, redoubling strokes on strokes, and wounds on wounds on the sacred body of the Saviour. At last, as St. Augustine relates, a Roman soldier, moved to compassion and horror at the sight of such brutal butchery, raising his voice, cried out, "Hold! Do you mean to kill a Man who has not yet been adjudged guilty?" and so saying he drew his sword and cut the ropes which bound Jesus to the pillar. Through all the torture He had stood motionless, without uttering a groan or even a sigh, like a meek lamb led out to slaughter.

So great was the weakness of Jesus that when the ropes were cut He fell to the ground and became bathed in His own blood which had collected in a small pool at His feet. His fall was witnessed by all, but no one advanced to raise Him. Struggling to His feet with difficulty, He painfully moved to the place where He had left His clothes and hastily put them on to cover His

nakedness, which was more painful to Him than the scourging.

Mary, the beloved Mother of Jesus, was present, but, at the first blow of the executioner, she beheld a stream of the sacred blood of her Divine Son fly up into the air, and she swooned. When she recovered, she saw Him wounded from head to foot, but, being unable to assist or even to reach Him on account of the great multitude and her own extreme weakness, she was forced to remain an afflicted witness of His terrible sufferings, lovingly consoled and comforted, however, by Mary Magdalene and St. John, who, during all the passion, were her constant and inseparable companions.

Considering all these sufferings of Jesus and Mary, shall we complain of some infirmities or tribulations which, to try our patience or to punish us for our sins, God may from time to time be pleased to send us? "O Eternal Father," cries St. Augustine, "look upon Thy Son, and through and for Him forgive Thy guilty servant! Look on the lacerated flesh of Thy Son, and forgive the sins of my rebellious flesh; while the latter provokes Thee to wrath, the former shall incline Thee to mercy."

CONSIDERATION XXXII.

Jesus is crowned with Thorns.

"And platting a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand."—*St. Matt.* xxvii. 29.

First Point.

THE scourging of our Lord was barbarous, atrocious, and inhuman; but the crowning with thorns was still more so, because it was not ordered by a judge, for it was never used as a mode of punishment, and because the head is the noblest part of the body. It was the most tormenting incident in our Saviour's painful passion, and lasted longer than the scourging or the crucifixion. Even the very act of dying was less painful to Him, for that was soon over, and put an end to all His sufferings; whereas the pain of crowning followed Him to His last breath, and made Him suffer as many deaths as there intervened instants between the hour of His crowning and that of His death.

Before He was crowned with thorns, Jesus was dragged back to the tribunal, and there the whole Roman cohort, which comprised fifteen hundred men, gathered around. Some of them removed His garments and put on Him a scarlet cloak which was intended as a royal mantle, and "platting a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand."

We should profoundly meditate upon these things in

order to form, if possible, a faint idea of the intense torture which Jesus must have suffered on this occasion.

In the first place, He was stripped of His garments. As they were sticking to His gashed and bleeding flesh, their removal caused a reopening of His wounds, some of which were so wide as to allow His bones to be seen.

In the second place, we should consider that after the scourging only one part of the Saviour's body remained intact,—His sacred head; but these barbarians determined that it should not be without its torture. So, according to the Seraphic Doctor, St. Bonaventure, they said among themselves, "He said He was King of the Jews; well, let us give Him a dress befitting a king, and provide for Him a crown, and so let us deck His head with a crown of thorns." Only the Jews, moved by the instigations of Satan, could invent so infamous and cruel a plan of torture, and only a sanguinary and avaricious people like the Romans, who in this instance were well supplied with gold by the Jews, could carry such a plan into execution.

There still exists in the environs of Jerusalem a species of tree called Ranno, on which grow long sharp thorns. Formerly the inhabitants of that city employed the Ranno extensively for garden hedges, and there were many gardens there at the time of our Lord. It was not, therefore, very difficult for the soldiers to procure thorns, and they may even have found them in the guard-room among the fuel. However they came by them, they availed themselves of them to plat a horrible crown for our Saviour. According to some, it was made in the form of a wreath that it might encircle His head; according to others, it was shaped like a cap, so as to cover the whole head.

Having platted the crown, they placed it upon His head and pressed it down by beating it with a stick until the thorns pierced the skin and penetrated in different directions the forehead, eyebrows, temples, and skull, some of the longest reaching the brain. At first the blood began to flow in drops, but as the wounds grew wider, it fairly streamed forth. The thorns that thus tortured that sacred head were seventy-two in number; but the punctures made by them were, according to St. Bernard, over a thousand. "Who, then, can conceive," says St. Vincent Ferrer, "the intense anguish of that sacred head pierced with thorns, since we, if we have only some slight wound on any part of our body, deem the pain almost unbearable?" Let us meditate attentively on this mystery of the crowning with thorns.

Second Point.

One would think that the brutal crowning with thorns would have satisfied the barbarity of the Jews and Romans. But no; when they saw Jesus bathed in His own blood, with not a sound part in His whole body—as Isaias in spirit had foreseen Him—they resolved to add tortures of mind to His tortures of body. Accordingly they compelled Him to sit down on a short pillar which is still preserved in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, at Jerusalem, under the name of the "Column of Reproaches," and, placing in His hand a reed for a sceptre, they passed before Him two by two, bent the knee, and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews."

But their insults did not stop here; some struck His sacred face and spit upon Him; others snatched the reed from His hand and struck Him with it upon the head.

They trampled upon Him, blasphemed Him, and reviled Him in every way. Under the burden of so many insults, Jesus did not once open His mouth, verifying the words of the prophet: "He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before His shearer, and He shall not open His mouth" (Isaias liii. 7).

Come out, O daughters of Sion, to see your pacific King with the new diadem which the synagogue has placed upon His head. "The One," says St. Bernard, "who is ever crowned with glory by His Eternal Father; the One who was crowned by Mary with the crown of our humanity; the One who, in the general judgment, shall be crowned with a crown of justice by the angels, —is now crowned by the synagogue with a crown of thorns and tortures!"

The Seraphic Doctor, St. Bonaventure, filled with sorrow and indignation at the sight of Jesus crowned with thorns, exclaims: "O my most amiable Jesus! how bitter and terrible the anguish Thou sufferest! How is it that my soul doth not faint within me at the dread spectacle? Why doth not my heart melt with grief, and why do not my eyes overflow with tears? Come, O my tears! flow forth from the bottom of my heart. O heart of stone within me, how is it thou dost not break? What! my innocent Jesus suffereth so much for me, and I do not pity Him! Have pity on me, O merciful Jesus! because I can recall all these Thy sufferings and meanwhile remain insensible. Touch Thou my heart with a dart of Thy love, that I may only sorrow with Thee in Thy anguish."

Behold how the Seraphic Doctor, who had always before his mind the passion of our Lord, and who was ever moved to tears at its remembrance, accuses himself

of indifference and begs the Lord to soften his heart. Let us do the same, and, following the advice of St. Bernard, let us often consider how much our Father, our Brother, our Master, suffered for us. But it is not sufficient to excite our hearts to compassion, we must also resolve to suffer willingly for His sake. Since Jesus suffered under a crown of thorns for love of us, let us bear up under our afflictions for love of Him. Since Jesus was divested of His garments for our sake, let us divest ourselves of our evil habits for His sake. Since Jesus was clothed in a robe of purple for us, let us abandon the vanities of the world for Him. Since Jesus bore insult and opprobrium for our sake, let us bear patiently any insulting words which may be addressed to us. For a God who has suffered so much, let us be willing to suffer something.

The fruit of our meditation should be a firm resolution to be patient under afflictions and infirmities, to be resigned in everything, to be silent under insults and injuries, to hate sin, and to love the cross to the end.

CONSIDERATION XXXIII.

Jesus Christ crowned with Thorns is shown to the People.

("Jesus therefore came forth, bearing a crown of thorns, and the purple garment.) And He saith to them: Behold the Man."—*St. John* xix. 5.

First Point.

THE soldiers heaped insults and outrages upon the patient Saviour seated on the Column of Reproaches, and they would, perhaps, have prolonged their fiendish sport had not Pilate, noticing the delay made in announcing the execution of the scourging, commanded Jesus to be brought before him. Alas! how horrified must not that judge have become on beholding the Redeemer in so frightful a condition? He could not have believed Him to be the man whom he had so recently confronted, had he not observed that the Jews were filled with the same diabolical fury against Him. On beholding the Saviour so sadly changed, His body all bruised, His sacred head transfixed with thorns, His countenance covered with blood, His whole form trembling and almost sinking from weakness and exhaustion, it occurred to Pilate that at so affecting a sight the Jews would at last be moved to compassion; so he resolved to show Him to the people, and thus make another effort to save His life.

Meanwhile, the atrium and street were crowded with

people who had come to witness the proceedings of the trial. All were impatient to see it brought to an end, and the intensest indignation continued to be manifested against the judge and the alleged criminal.

Now, adjacent to the tribunal there was an open gallery extending across the public street like a bridge and exposed to view on every side, so that any one passing over it could be seen, not only by persons standing in the street below, but also by those stationed at the windows of the neighboring houses. An arch known by the name "Ecce Homo" still exists at Jerusalem and keeps alive the memory of this famous gallery. It attracts the eye of the tourist at once as he emerges from the extreme western portion of the city.

It was from this gallery that Pilate resolved to show the Saviour to the people in the hope of moving them to compassion; and to make the spectacle more solemn, he determined that he himself would present the alleged culprit.

Accordingly he advanced to the gallery, and, taking a position there with Jesus by his side, thus addressed the assembled multitude: "Behold the Man. Behold the Man whom you have delivered into my hands to be judged! Behold to what a miserable state He has been reduced by my orders which were given to please you! Look upon Him well, and tell me whether you can any longer recognize Him, and whether I could well have punished Him more severely. I have already told you that I believe Him innocent, nor do I yet find any cause in Him to justify me in condemning Him. I have already done enough; nay, I fear that in my desire to satisfy your wishes I have gone too far by punishing an innocent man. Be content, therefore, with seeing Him

reduced to this miserable state in which He retains scarcely a human resemblance."

"Behold the Man," says St. Augustine, paraphrasing this passage, "behold the Man no longer illustrious by the possession of power, but covered with opprobrium! If hitherto you envied Him His power, now that you see Him reduced so low, forgive Him the delusion under which He labored, and which made Him call Himself a king. He has been scourged, crowned with thorns; a rag of purple is His royal mantle; He has been mocked and despised; He has been struck, and spit upon, and subjected to every humiliation. Lay aside, therefore, your envy and hatred of Him, now that He has been brought to shame—a shame without measure."

The paraphrase of Blessed Cherubino of Spoleto runs as follows: "Behold the Man! Behold to what a miserable condition He has been reduced, so low that almost all human resemblance has been obliterated in Him! And yet He is not a dog—He is not a beast! He is of your own blood, He is of your own kin, He is of your own nation! Therefore, have pity on Him and allow me, since I cannot restore to Him His resemblance to a human being, to bestow upon Him the poor boon of the preservation of His life."

Let us examine our own hearts and see what impression is made upon them by the contemplation of the scourging at the pillar.

Second Point.

What heart of flint would not have been softened at the sight of this Man of Sorrows? Yet this pitiful spectacle did not awaken the least sentiment of humanity in the

minds of the chief priests, the ancients of the people, the scribes and Pharisees, and the Jewish populace; but, like Hyrcan tigers, the more blood they saw, the more thirsty for blood they became, and so they sent up a fierce shout of hatred against Jesus, and cried, "Let Him be crucified; crucify Him, crucify Him."

O cruel and impious men! what has this Man done to you that you so eagerly wish to see Him suspended on the cross? Alas! look on Him once more and harden not your hearts to shut out His loving call. Behold how He who was the Expected of nations is now despised! Behold, that heavenly countenance, the sight of which had been so eagerly desired through all past ages, is now disfigured! Behold, how He whom your ancestors had longed and prayed for, and who was at last, by a special grace, granted to you, is now reprobated and condemned! O Abraham! behold Him whom you had so ardently desired to see! O Isaias, behold Him of whom you prophesied so many things! O David, O prophets, O patriarchs, behold the only begotten Son of God, so often and so long announced by you, and so long expected by the nations of the earth! Behold the Son of man, not crowned with a crown of glory and honor, but immersed in anguish and ignominy! Come forth from your long-sealed tombs to behold Him, and say if you recognize in Him the Messias, the subject of your prophecies, the object of your desires throughout the ages!

But it is vain to hope to see the Jews moved to pity by the sight of the Man of Sorrows. It is vain to call upon the patriarchs and prophets to bear witness to the multitude of His afflictions. But we Christians, who with eyes of faith contemplate our suffering Saviour, should endeavor to bring Him some comfort by attentively medi-

tating on His deplorable condition, and sincerely and lovingly sympathizing with Him in His anguish. Consider, then, O Christian soul! who it is that stands there on the gallery, apparently in the guise of a king, but really covered with shame and despised as the last of men. He wears a crown; but, oh! what pain it causes to His sacred head! He is clothed in purple; but here it symbolizes not royalty and honor, but baseness and contempt. He holds in His hand a sceptre, but it is no sign of authority and power, for it has been often snatched by the soldiers and violently used to wound His sacred person. Yes, those around Him have frequently bent the knee and hailed Him as their King; but the salutation was strongly negatived by the disgusting spittle which always accompanied it.

In the second place, let us consider the unalterable patience of our Divine Lord. He murmurs not against His Eternal Father who has sent Him into this ungrateful world to become an object of injury and opprobrium; He murmurs not against mankind for whose crimes He is subjected to torture; He utters not a word of complaint against the Jewish people who are loading Him with insults in return for the numberless benefits He had bestowed on them.

Considering these words of Pilate to the people, "Behold the Man," St. Augustine applies them to himself and offers the following reflection: "Alas! woe for us will be the day when we shall be presented before the judgment-seat of God, and it shall be said of each of us, 'Behold the man. Behold the man and the deeds of his life.' Alas! what shall we be able to answer on that great day?"

Without losing sight of the Man-God as He is repre-

sented by Pilate to the Jewish people, let us say within ourselves: "Behold the Man! Yes, O my soul! behold the Man who hath so loved thee and suffered for thee, and whom thou in return hast so often and so grievously offended. Fix thy gaze upon Him, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His. Look upon that venerable head so cruelly crowned with thorns! Look upon that sacred body covered with so many wounds! Look upon that divine face impiously polluted with spittle,—and then if thou be still insensible to His sufferings, let thy voice, too, mingle with the voices of the Jewish rabble, and cry out, "Let Him be crucified! let Him be crucified!"

I once saw in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem two Turkish soldiers earnestly contemplating a picture representing Pilate's presentation of the Saviour to the Jews, and judging by their countenances they were deeply moved by the suffering and anguish depicted there. Yet these poor infidels did not know whether the divine original of that picture was an innocent man or not; and shall we who know by faith that such an image, such a picture of the "Ecce Homo" represents the Man of Sorrows, the Man-God, who subjected Himself to all kinds of sufferings for us,—shall we remain insensible and gaze upon that divine face unmoved?

O loving Jesus! soften our hardened hearts once and forever, that we may truly know and properly appreciate all Thy love for us.

CONSIDERATION XXXIV.

Jesus is again questioned by Pontius Pilate, and then condemned to the Death of the Cross.

"Then therefore he delivered Him to them to be crucified."
St. John xix. 16.

First Point.

PILATE had made many efforts to save Jesus, but the Jews still clamored for His crucifixion; at last, weary of reasoning with that obstinate people, he said to them, "Take Him you, and judge Him according to your law." But the Jews answered, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death" (St. John xviii. 31). They further added that Jesus had declared Himself to be the Son of God, which of itself made Him deserving of death.

Believing Jesus to be innocent, Pilate could not bring himself to acquiesce in this wicked desire of the Jews; but when he heard the last accusation, he was seized with fear and began to regret having condemned Him to be scourged, not because he compassionated or venerated the Saviour, but because he feared for himself and his own interests. Indeed, so strong was this fear that he re-entered the tribunal, ordered Jesus to be again brought before him, and, having dismissed the guards, began to question Him anew, saying, "Whence art Thou?" But the Redeemer gave no answer.

During the process of the trial Pilate had learned that Jesus was a Galilean, and that He belonged to the Jewish nation. But he was not satisfied with this knowledge; he wished to know His origin and parentage, and to ascertain if He really were a divinity. The advice of his wife still disturbed him; the fame of the Saviour's miracles had reached his ears; the patience and fortitude with which He bore the scourging and suffered throughout the trial had aroused his admiration; and now upon hearing that He claimed to be the Son of God, he strongly suspected that His claim, perhaps, was true. Hence the question, "Whence art Thou?"

Offended at the silence of Jesus, and forgetting for a moment his suspicion, Pilate angrily said, "Speakest Thou not to me? knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and I have power to release Thee?" To this our Lord modestly replied: "It is true, it is in thy power to do justice or not, to condemn Me or to release Me; but know that thou shouldst not have any power against Me, unless it were given thee from above. Therefore he that hath delivered Me to thee hath the greater sin." This humble answer aroused new suspicions and apprehensions in the judge's mind, and, full of fear, gnawed by remorse for the past, doubtful for the present, and anxious for the future, he paused to consider how he might be enabled to set Jesus at liberty. Noticing the length of time that Pilate remained apart with Jesus, and remembering the deference with which he had treated Him throughout the trial, the Jews began to suspect the workings of Pilate's mind and feelings, and resolved to allow him no time to mature his plans; hence they cried out, "If thou release this Man, thou art not Cæsar's friend. For whosoever maketh himself a king

speaketh against Cæsar." This was equivalent to saying, "By liberating one who has made himself king thou showest that thou carest little for Cæsar's sovereign power; and for this thou shalt certainly fall under his displeasure."

These words put the climax to the doubts and apprehensions of Pilate, and he said within himself, "If I condemn this Man, I betray my duty, my conscience, and the cause of justice, and perhaps I draw down upon myself the anger of the gods; but, on the other hand, if I release Him, the Jews will accuse me before Cæsar of having set at liberty a Man whom they had delivered to me as a seducer of the people and a rebel. What shall I do? what shall I do?" O weak-minded judge, do thy duty, and fear not!

Let us apply to ourselves the fears, doubts, and apprehensions of Pilate. When the world, the flesh, and the devil tempt us to sin, do we not feel within our hearts the impulse of divine grace, the fear, the reproaches of our conscience dissuading us from yielding our consent? Happy for us if, hearkening to those interior voices which proceed from God, we turn away from the beckonings of temptation, and close our ears to the allurements of vice.

Second Point.

Deafened by the noise and howlings of the Jewish rabble, Pilate again ascended his judgment-seat, not to condemn Jesus, but to make one last effort to set Him at liberty. Near the tribunal, and within the precincts of the governor's palace, there was a place called in Greek *Lithostrotos*, and in Hebrew *Gabbatha*, which, according

to St. Jerome, signifies high, celebrated. It was accessible by means of several marble steps which constitute the Holy Stairs now sacredly preserved in Rome. At the top of these steps stood two large stones, one red and wrought in the form of a throne, the other black and shaped like a bench; the former was used as a seat for the judge, the latter as a seat for the culprit.

Leading Jesus to this place, and ascending his throne, Pilate said to the Jews, "Behold your King." This expression was ironical, for he did not believe Christ to be the King of the Jews. He might as well have said: "Behold, O Jews, that King whom you fear so much and whose life you seek so anxiously. Look at Him. He has been scourged until His bones are laid almost bare: He has been struck, mocked, and spit upon, and finally covered with a rag of purple. Is it, perhaps, this royal purple that so much troubles you? He holds in His hand a rod. Think you it is the royal sceptre, grasped by all your ancient kings, and which, now swayed by Cæsar Augustus, holds the world in fear and awe? Approach and see it: it is only an empty reed, a symbol of weakness rather than of power. Look at the crown of thorns He wears: is this His royal diadem? This Man whom you so much hate and so much fear, and whom you wish me to condemn to death,—what evil has He done? what evil can He do? He is helpless; if questioned, He answers not; if insulted, He makes no reply. I have punished Him in order to please you, and He has borne His punishment with patience. Why then do you persist in calling for His execution? You say that He wished to make Himself king. Behold, He is here in irons; He is here before you and me, despised as the lowest among men, the butt and opprobrium of the rab-

ble. If really He wished to be king, behold the strange manner of royalty He has attained!"

Pilate's harangue was in vain; the Jews were more than ever enraged against the Saviour, and cried out again, "Away with Him, away with Him! crucify Him!" On hearing this frantic and unreasonable demand, the judge could no longer restrain his indignation, and giving it free vent he said, "Shall I therefore crucify your King?" But the Jews cried out with still greater fury, and the chief priests made answer, "We have no king but Cæsar." At last, overcome by the fear that he might be accused before Cæsar of being an accomplice to the crime of high treason, and thus be deprived of his position, the impious and unjust judge pronounced the sentence of death and delivered Jesus to be crucified.

O perfidious judge! if thou didst desire to commit such injustice, why didst thou delay so long? Why didst thou send Him to Herod to have Him mocked? Why didst thou condemn Him to be scourged, and exposed naked before the whole multitude? Why didst thou permit Him to be crowned with thorns? O perfidious! O impious!

But while we justly condemn the conduct of Pilate, what spiritual profit shall we derive from the consideration of his unjust sentence? Let it be a firm resolution to conquer human respect, and to be willing to die a thousand deaths rather than betray our conscience.

CONSIDERATION XXXV.

Jesus sets out towards Mount Calvary.

"And after they had mocked Him, they took off the cloak from Him, and put on Him His own garments, and led Him away to crucify Him."—*St. Matt.* xxvii. 31.

First Point.

THE sentence of death which Pilate pronounced against Jesus was a great triumph for the Jews and a complete victory for the synagogue, and would have caused unusual rejoicing in hell, were rejoicing possible in that place of horrors and perpetual despair. Signs of exultation were visible on every side. The rabble were transported with joy by the abominable sentence, and the chief priests and members of the Sanhedrim swelled with pride at the thought of the victory they had achieved. The executioners, who were well paid for their barbarity, immediately proceeded to discharge the infernal obligations of their office, falling upon Jesus like lions upon their prey. "They have taken Me as a lion prepared for the prey: and as a young lion dwelling in secret places" (Psalms xvi. 12).

Their first act was to tear off the purple mantle and reclothe Him in His own garments. They made this change

for several reasons: First, that He might be more readily recognized by the people; secondly, that the sufferings of His wounded body might be increased by the violent removal of the adhering cloak; thirdly, that advantage might be taken of that clause in their law which allowed the executioners to divide among themselves the garments of the culprit at the place of execution.

Having clothed Him, they led Him out of the tribunal, and then dragged Him to the court-yard where lay the heavy cross prepared for Him. St. Thomas of Villanova tells us that Jesus did not wait for the soldiers to place it upon His shoulders, but that upon seeing it He eagerly advanced and, raising it, embraced and kissed it. What a confusion for us, to see our Lord embracing and kissing the cross, while we employ every means in our power to avoid it!—and yet our cross, however heavy, can never be compared with His.

With this burden pressing on His shoulders Jesus started towards Mount Calvary. "And bearing His own cross He went forth to that place which is called Calvary, but in Hebrew Golgotha (St. John xix. 17). "Great spectacle!" exclaims St. Augustine, "to see the Victim carrying on His own shoulders the instrument of His torture; great mockery, if we consider the impiety of the Jews; but still greater mystery, if we contemplate the piety of Jesus!" St. Bernard says that Jesus bore that cross which in a short time was to bear Him.

Blessed Simon of Cassia thus apostrophizes the Saviour bending under the weight of the cross: "Whither goest Thou, O amiable Jesus, with that heavy cross? Where carriest Thou it? Why sweatest Thou so much under its burden?" Ah! we know only too well where and why He is carrying it.

Here let us pause and make a fruitful reflection: Jesus, who is the prototype of innocence, joyfully accepts and carries the heavy cross which His enemies have prepared for Him; and we, who are guilty of a thousand sins, refuse to bear with patience the little cross of daily trials which He is pleased sometimes to send us. Let us compare our conduct with His, and, confounded at the difference, let us resolve that, though we are not generous enough to suffer anything for Him, we will at least be humane enough to desist from treating Him with further cruelty and insult by our grievous offences. Let us also consider these words of our Lord: "He who taketh not up his cross and followeth Me is not worthy of Me."

Second Point.

Let us go in spirit to Jerusalem and witness the procession to Mount Calvary. The cavalry with flying flags comes first, and makes its way with difficulty through the surging crowd which throngs the street. Next appear the executioners, bearing in their hands hammers, pincers, nails, and other instruments for the crucifixion. They are followed by a herald, or rather a public crier, who proclaims with a loud voice, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, condemned to the death of the cross." He is followed by the gentle Lamb of God. O Christian soul, behold this awful spectacle! Jesus, your Saviour, slowly advances, bowed down under the weight of the cross, covered with perspiration and completely exhausted. He walks between two thieves, also condemned to death, but not carrying their crosses. A clamorous multitude of every description and condition press round Him, gaze unpityingly upon Him, gloat over the horrible sight of His suf-

ferings, and rend the air with their insulting and blasphemous cries.

St. Laurence Justinian says that Jesus moved along slowly, His eyes downcast, His head bent forward, His muscles relaxed, all languid and breathless, thoroughly exhausted by the outrages to which He was subjected in the palaces of Annas, Caiphas, Herod, and Pilate. But what pained Him more than all were the blasphemies of that insolent crowd.

Who is there possessed of any sense of humanity who would not weep, and weep bitterly, at this awful sight? Yet, far from being moved to tears, the Jews are filled with the greatest joy. Oh, what a change in one short week! He who is passing there with slow and feeble step, His knees trembling, His eyes downcast and sunken, His hair dishevelled, His face covered with blood, His head crowned with thorns, His form bending beneath the weight of the cross,—He is the Holy One who, one week ago, entered Jerusalem in a procession of triumph, amid the loud hosannas of the multitude, who proclaimed Him Son of David. Oh, how different the two processions! "Then," says St. Anselm, "He was received as king; now He is driven out from the city an outcast."

This sad lesson should be taken to heart and often carefully pondered, especially by those who rely too much upon their own strength; by those who, having received some spiritual consolation, think themselves arrived at the height of perfection; and finally, by those who, after having remained for some time without offending God, deem their salvation assured and look upon others as lost, without reflecting that if they have done some good work, and have not fallen into sin, it is simply an effect of God's grace.

Let us resolve to make it a principle of conduct not to glory in the good which we may have done nor in the evil which we have avoided. Let us thank God for having preserved us from those faults which we so much detest in others and beg Him to have mercy on us all.

CONSIDERATION XXXVI.

Jesus falls for the first time: He meets His Blessed Mother.

"And bearing His own cross, He went forth to that place which is called Calvary, but in Hebrew Golgotha."—*St. John* xix. 17.

First Point.

THE road over which our Lord passed on the way to execution may still be seen among the ruins of Jerusalem. Part level, part hilly, here straight and there tortuous, it extends from the tribunal of the Roman Governor to Mount Calvary, a distance of about eight hundred and twenty paces. At intervals it is dotted by pieces of marble columns strewn promiscuously over the ground, or by marble slabs inserted in the walls, both stones and slabs indicating the various stations frequented by the faithful in ancient times. It is called the Dolorous Road, also the Way of the Cross, and the stations which line its course correspond to those pictured on the walls of our churches.

Let us now go in spirit to visit these stations, and meditate on them with contrite hearts. We shall not visit them all, but only those which, being more dolorous, will more powerfully appeal to our feelings and excite us to

contrition. To-day let us consider the first fall of our Blessed Lord under the cross, and His meeting with His afflicted Mother.

It is true that the Evangelists make no special mention of these two stations; but they are also silent about other circumstances even more relevant. Still these circumstances are not less reliable, because they have been handed down to the faithful by an uninterrupted tradition, and have been countenanced by the Church.

According to Cornelius à Lapide the cross was fifteen feet in length and eight feet in breadth. As our Lord carried it on His shoulders, the lower part must have dragged upon the ground, and we may suppose that it often met with obstructions or uneven places, against which it knocked with such violence as to give a fearful shock to His already enfeebled frame. Sometimes, too, in the rebound the upper part of the cross often struck against His sacred head, pressing further the crown of thorns and renewing all the agony of the hour of crowning.

Our Holy Redeemer's pace is as rapid as His strength will allow, yet the executioners are not satisfied; they are impatient to reach Calvary. They push Him, and shower blows upon Him, until, at last, completely exhausted, He falls to the ground under the cross. Immediately those barbarous men gather around Him, prod Him with their swords, strike Him with their fists, kick Him, and finally, attaching a rope around His neck, they drag Him to His feet and oblige Him to continue the painful journey to Calvary.

Without doubt, every one of us has a cross to carry; but who can say that his is as heavy as that under which our Saviour fell? Let us often look at the cross of Jesus,

and ours, though it may indeed be heavy, shall appear light and its burden no longer distressing. It is true that the service of God is not easy for our corrupt nature; but it is not hard to carry the cross in company with our loving Saviour. It is still a burden, but only a light one. Therefore, let us walk on courageously in the hours of infirmity and tribulation, never losing sight of Jesus, who, with His heavy cross, moves in advance.

Second Point.

Situated on the Way of the Cross is a little chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Spasm, in memory of the acute pain which she suffered there upon meeting her Divine Son. In front of this chapel a short, narrow street leads off the Dolorous Way in the direction of Pilate's palace. A tradition relates that when Mary heard of Jesus' condemnation she attempted to reach Him, but being unable to make her way through the crowd, she hastened with St. John down this narrow street, and took a position at its intersection with the Way of the Cross, to await His coming and offer Him words of consolation and bid Him farewell.

No sooner had she reached this place than the procession passed. What must have been her anguish when she caught sight of her Divine Son loaded with His cross, walking between two thieves, and surrounded by brutal soldiers who ceased not for a moment to insult and torture Him! At this heart-rending sight Mary rose superior even to herself, and rushing among the rabble, she forced her way as far as the executioners who, amazed at her heroism, stood back, thus allowing her to approach and embrace her beloved Son. Finding Himself in the arms

of His holy Mother, Jesus experienced the keenest anguish. No one can imagine the bitterness of grief, the pangs of sorrow, the acuteness of agony, felt at that moment by those two great and sensitive souls. Reflect that it is the Mother of God who meets her Divine Son on His way to execution; that He is covered with blood and wounds; that His countenance is disfigured, His frame enfeebled, and a heavy cross rests upon His shoulders; that He walks between two thieves, and is surrounded by cruel executioners who are thirsting for His blood. Can any but a mother attempt to estimate this Mother's grief?

Venerable Father Bartholomew of Saluzzo thus speaks of Mary on this occasion: "How different, O Mary, this last embrace from the many thou hast hitherto bestowed upon thy Son! Oh, what grief! Oh, what a sword of grief must have pierced thy heart! What words of love and compassion must not Mary have exchanged with her Son! Tell me, most amiable Jesus, what didst Thou say to Thy Mother at that painful meeting? . . . Think, O my soul, what must His words have been! 'Have patience, dear Mother; the hour of My death has arrived, but My anguish shall soon cease. I will rise within three days, and come to visit you.' 'O dear Child,' replied Mary, 'am I then compelled to see Thee reduced to such a state? Alas! how can I live when Thou, who art the life of my soul, shalt die?'"

St. Bernard thus apostrophizes Jesus on the same occasion: "Great is the grief caused Thee, O my good Jesus, by the burden of Thy cross, but not less is that caused Thee by the sight of Thy Mother; the bitterness of Thy torments oppresseth Thee, but the grief of Thy Mother oppresseth Thee more."

The fruit of this meditation should be a tender compassion for the sufferings of Jesus and the grief of Mary, with an earnest appeal to them both to grant us the grace of knowing all they endured for our salvation. For, if we shall attain to this holy knowledge, it will certainly be easy for us to support any suffering for their love.

CONSIDERATION XXXVII.

Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry His Cross.

"And going out they found a man of Cyrene, named Simon: him they forced to take up His cross."—*St. Matt.* xxvii. 32.

First Point.

MARY was with Jesus only a few moments, for, recovering from their surprise, the executioners tore her from the arms of her martyred Son and rudely pushed her back into the crowd; then closing around Jesus, they forced Him by kicks and blows to accelerate His pace in order to make up for the time lost during the brief interview with His Mother. But Jesus was too weak to bear up longer under the heavy cross; His strength began visibly to fail, and the executioners, becoming alarmed lest He should die on the way and thus deprive them of the brutal satisfaction of crucifying Him, began to devise means of relieving Him. Observe that they are actuated, not by any motive of charity, but by a spirit of malignity, desiring, as Dionysius remarks, to reserve Him for a death more atrocious and painful.

But who would submit to take up that cross which rendered infamous any one who carried it? The Romans hated the cross; so did the Jews. How, therefore, were they to attain their iniquitous end? They found a way

through injustice and violence, the chief means employed by them during the passion.

A man named Simon, a Cyrenian, happened to pass. Though a native of Cyrene, he had long been a resident of Judea, and was at this time coming from a farm which he possessed in the neighborhood. The Jews ran after him, halted him, and, despite all his prayers, protestations, entreaties, and efforts to escape, forced him to take up and carry the cross. "And going out they found a man named Simon: him they forced to take up His cross."

Happy Simon, if thou couldst but know the lot that hath fallen to thee! Ah, if thou couldst only know Whom thou art called upon to aid! Then, indeed, that cross would seem to thee too light, and its burden thou wouldst esteem a high honor! But alas! thou knowest Him not, and therefore thou dost carry it unwillingly and by force; and thou findest torture in an object where thou shouldst find heaven.

Let us apply these same reflections to ourselves. Infirmities, afflictions of spirit, poverty, humiliations, contradictions, and persecutions are all crosses which Almighty God sends us for our spiritual benefit. But do we carry them with willingness and joy? Do we not, on the contrary, try to avoid them and rid ourselves of them as soon as possible? And yet we know that they are so many aids to securing salvation; and that He who sends them knows how much we can bear, and never permits us to be burdened beyond our strength. Why, therefore, do we not support our crosses with patience and resignation for the love of God

Second Point.

Dionysius Carthusianus adduces as a reason for the Jews' relieving Jesus, that they feared lest He should die on the way and they would be thus deprived of the infernal pleasure of seeing Him expire on the cross. This opinion is supported by the nature of the ground of the Dolorous Way. Up to the fourth station the road is quite level and slightly ascending; but at the point where Simon was arrested it begins to be difficult, precipitous, and rough. The Jews, therefore, naturally foresaw that His weak and exhausted condition would not allow Him to make the ascent alone.

But there was for the Jews another cause of alarm. They knew that Pilate had condemned Him unwillingly, that he had even declared Him innocent in the presence of all, and they feared a revocation of the sentence of death. Therefore they wished to expedite the crucifixion, and on this account relieved Jesus of the cross.

To Simon of Cyrene fell the great honor of being the companion of Jesus to Mount Calvary. But, considering the Man of Sorrows a malefactor, and the carrying of the cross the most ignominious of punishments, he bore it only with reluctance; nay, he had to be subjected to it by force, as we learn from the Gospel narration.

We know that of which Simon was ignorant; yet how does it happen that we are unwilling to aid Jesus in carrying His cross? We look upon the cross with the eyes of faith, and view it in a far different light from that in which it was seen by Simon. We know that Jesus Christ has said, "And whosoever doth not carry his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple"

(St. Luke xiv. 27). We have before us the example of the virgins, confessors, martyrs, apostles, and of Mary and Jesus, who all carried their crosses, and crosses heavier than ours. We know that without the cross we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. We know that whether we will it or not we must carry the cross. Finally, we know that Jesus Christ helps us to bear our cross, and ever renders it light and sweet if we accept it with patience and resignation. Shall we not henceforth bear our crosses willingly and patiently for love of Him

If in the past we have failed in this regard, let us for the future accept resignedly all tribulations, persecutions, and infirmities, and every affliction of body or soul which God may be pleased to send us; even entering into the spirit of the apostles of whom it is written, "And they indeed went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus" (Acts v. 41). Let us imitate those many servants of God who, without retiring into convents or practising severe penances, became saints, because they embraced with resignation the crosses which were annexed to their state of life. If we are so happy as to enter into this holy spirit, we shall be true followers of Christ, and shall receive a great reward in this life, and also in the next.

Let us then carry the cross, but not as it was borne by Simon of Cyrene, who, as the Abbot Rupert observes, did not bear the cross willingly, neither was he crucified on it. Let us, on the contrary, so carry our cross as to be crucified on it, not in body, but in spirit—that is, with our vices and concupiscences.

CONSIDERATION XXXVIII.

Jesus consoles the Women of Jerusalem who weep over Him: Veronica wipes His Face with a Handkerchief.

"But Jesus turning to them said: Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over Me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children."—*St. Luke* xxiii. 28.

First Point.

THOUGH relieved of His cross, Jesus was still so weak and exhausted that He could scarcely walk; yet the executioners, impatient to reach Calvary, ceased not to push and drag Him along. This weakness and the violence of the executioners caused His second and third fall, which we commemorate in the beautiful exercise of the Way of the Cross. Still, in these last moments of His mortal career, though Himself plunged in the midst of a sea of suffering, Jesus was full of compassion for the sufferings of others, and consoled those devout persons who grieved for Him by giving them tokens of gratitude and sympathy.

St. Luke the Evangelist relates that a multitude of men and women followed Jesus. This multitude was composed principally of fanatical Jews, who, at the instigation of the priests and ancients of the people, had cried out at the tribunal, "Let Him be crucified!" and,

having wrung from Pilate the unjust sentence against Jesus, ceaselessly insulted and blasphemed Him. But there also mingled with the crowd some of the Redeemer's disciples, and some pious women who wept bitterly and struck their breasts as they followed Him. The beloved disciple St John was there; so also was the Blessed Virgin with her inseparable companion, Mary Magdalene, together with the other Marys of whom the Gospel speaks. There were also persons present who had followed Jesus from Galilee. But by far the greater number were from Jerusalem; and because they differed in opinion from the scribes and chief priests as to the character of Jesus, and pitied Him in His sufferings, they did not blush to draw near to Him, and, while the rabble deafened the ears with their blasphemous shouts, they wept most bitterly. Jesus, hearing their sobs, thus lovingly addressed them: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over Me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For behold, the days shall come wherein they will say: Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that have not born, and the paps that have not given suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains: Fall upon us; and to the hills: Cover us. For if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?" (St. Luke xxiii. 28–31.)

Venerable Bede thus paraphrases this Evangelical passage: "Weep not over Me, because you see Me going to meet temporal death; but weep bitter tears that you may not be condemned to eternal death with the impious in revenge for this cross on which I am going to be crucified for the salvation of men."

What a salutary subject for meditation is not this advice of Jesus Christ! He alluded to the tremendous

Day of Judgment, inciting those pious women to consider that if the Eternal Father so severely punished His Son for our sins, what shall become of the wicked on that awful day when mercy shall no longer have place, and all shall be obliged to give a strict account of every thought, word, and deed to that same God whom they have so often and so grievously offended! Oh, how much should we dread the coming of that tremendous day!

Second Point.

Though the address of our Lord to the pious women regarded the General Judgment, it also had reference to the terrible afflictions which were to come upon Jerusalem; for thirty-seven years after, when Titus besieged the Holy City, this terrible prediction of Jesus was literally fulfilled. Then many mothers had to deny food to their little ones; others went so far as to eat the flesh of their children; and all were so reduced that barren women, long objects of contempt, were looked upon as blessed, because not forced to see their children suffer. However, they did not then understand the meaning of His words; hence they continued to weep over Him, without thinking of the misfortunes in store for themselves.

One among the crowd, by name Veronica, whose house according to some pious authors fronted on the Dolorous Way (its site is pointed out even at the present time) was deeply moved with compassion for the Saviour. On seeing His sad condition, this heroic woman seemed forgetful of all save her strong sentiment of pity, and taking a white handkerchief—one, perhaps, which she had around her head—and pressing through the crowd till she reached

His side, she devoutly wiped away the tears and blood and the soldiers' filthy spittle from the face of the Man of Sorrows.

It is not known whether Veronica performed this act of heroic charity through a purely human impulse of compassion, or whether she was prompted by an illumination from on high which made known to her who He was that suffered. However, it is certain that our Lord was pleased with her charity, and at once rewarded it by leaving on the handkerchief the impression of His sacred countenance. This relic, one of the most precious on earth, is venerated in St. Peter's Church at Rome, and strongly reminds us of the infinite charity of Jesus in suffering for us, and His generosity in rewarding those who compassionate His sufferings.

From this consideration we may learn how great is the divine goodness, which never lets go unrewarded even the least act of charity. This reflection should encourage us to persevere in the practice of works of mercy. But, above all, we should learn how agreeable to Jesus is meditation on His passion—that meditation in which we can find the cure of all our spiritual infirmities, and all the treasures of celestial consolations. Let us, therefore, frequently meditate on the sufferings of Jesus, and we shall most certainly receive our reward in this life and in the next.

CONSIDERATION XXXIX.

Vinegar and Gall are offered to Jesus; He is stripped of His Garments and nailed to the Cross.

"And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, they crucified Him."—*St. Luke* xxiii. 33.

First Point.

HAVING traversed the full length of the Dolorous Way, the procession arrived at the place of execution. This place was called Calvary, a name signifying *skull*. It was a small hill which stood just outside the gates of the Holy City, in a northwesterly direction, and was flanked on one side by a garden belonging to Joseph of Arimathea, and on the other side by a valley known as the Vale of Dead Bodies, or the Vale of the Region of Death. With regard to the name Calvary, many say that it was suggested by the form of the mountain, which resembles that of a human skull. Others, among whom are Origen and St. Jerome, maintain that it was derived from an old tradition that Adam's skull had been buried there so that the blood of our Lord trickling down from the cross might fall upon it and wash away the sins of our first parent and those of all his unhappy posterity. It is for this reason that we frequently see the figure of a skull engraved or pictured at the foot of the cross. Fi-

nally, others are of the opinion that the mount was called Calvary because those condemned to death were executed there, and their bodies thrown into the valley below; whence the name of Vale of Ashes, or Vale of the Region of Death. But let us recur to the matter of the present consideration. Jesus, the executioners, and the crowd had at length arrived at the top of Mount Calvary Now, it was customary to give a condemned person a draught of wine mixed with myrrh in order to renew his bodily vigor,—that his suffering might be longer and more intense.

But Jewish hatred did more against their Messias. For wine and myrrh they substituted vinegar and gall, a potion worse than poison. Jesus did not refuse to approach the bitter chalice to His lips; but when He tasted it, He put it aside. Still He did taste it in order that the stomach and palate, which had hitherto escaped, might also be subjected to their particular torture.

The body of Jesus having thus been internally and externally tormented, the executioners again seized Him and renewed the pain already twice inflicted by the removal of His garments. Not satisfied with stripping Him of His outer vesture, they also took the seamless tunic which served Him as a shirt, and which had been woven by the virginal hands of His Mother. There is a tradition that she made it for her beloved Son in His childhood, and that, like the garments of the Jewish children in the desert, it had grown with His growth. They pulled this garment off over His head; and as it was quite narrow at the neck, they were obliged to remove the crown of thorns. These thorns being deeply imbedded in his head were not easily removed, and some of them broke and remained fixed in His delicate temples. But

there was still another torture reserved for Jesus: no sooner had the tunic been removed than the crown was replaced, opening up new wounds, and renewing all the martyrdom of the former crowning. How atrocious must have been this torture, the mere contemplation of which, even in imagination, causes us to shudder!

Second Point.

Everything was in readiness for the execution of the unjust sentence; the victim, the executioners, the instruments of torture,—all were there. The cross was laid upon the ground; and without a moment's hesitation, Jesus voluntarily advanced, stretched Himself upon it, extended His arms as if to invite the executioners to a loving embrace, and presented His hands and feet to be nailed. But those barbarous men, far from accepting the Saviour's proffered love, sprang upon Him like enraged lions hungry for their prey. While some bound Him with cords, others seized the hammers and nails, and the cruel work of crucifixion was begun. Behold the horrible butchery practised on those divine hands which had made heaven and earth! The right hand is seized upon first: the point of the nail breaks the skin; it is driven down through the flesh, tearing open nerves, veins, and arteries, and causing the precious blood to flow forth. Having nailed the right hand, the executioners proceed to the left, but find that, on account of the contraction of the muscles, it cannot be extended far enough for the perforating nail to enter the hole already bored in the cross for it. They, therefore, attach cords to the left arm, and bracing their feet against the cross, they pull and pull that sacred arm until, having dislocated the bones, they

wrench the hand to the required position and repeat on it the cruelties they had practised on the right. They then proceed to the feet, which for a similar reason are subjected to a process like that applied to the left hand. At last the infamous work is accomplished and Jesus is affixed to His cross.

Contemplative writers give other details in connection with the nailing of the Saviour to the cross which add still more to its horrors. They affirm that after the nails were driven, the executioners determined to rivet them, and for this purpose turned the cross over so that Jesus lay, face downward, under the cross. In this position they trampled upon Him, as grapes are trodden in the wine-press. At length His bones were so dislocated that they could be numbered; His eyes became dim and sunken in their sockets; His body appeared shrunken, and His stomach seemed to cleave to His back. Through the half-open mouth the tongue might be seen all covered with blood; His divine countenance and delicate limbs were disfigured by wounds, and His whole appearance justified the words of the prophet: "From the sole of the foot unto the top of the head there is no soundness therein: wounds, and bruises, and swelling sores: they are not bound up nor dressed, nor fomented with oil."

"O man!" cries out St. Bonaventure, "if thou didst see even a brute thus affixed to a cross wouldst thou not feel moved to pity for its sufferings? Shouldst thou not then be moved to compassion at the thought that so was crucified thy God?" To arouse us still more to compassion, the same holy Doctor subjoins: "Only think, O man, that it was principally on account of sinners that Christ was thus crucified!" St. Bernard echoes St.

Bonaventure and says: "Behold and consider, O sinner, what a martyrdom thy God underwent when He came in search of thee, before it was given Him to find thee!" Finally, let us say with St. Augustine, "O most amiable Jesus, I wish to live and die in Thy arms, those loving arms which were nailed to the cross for me!"

CONSIDERATION XL.

The Sorrowful Virgin.

"O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow."—*Lam.* i. 12.

First Point.

MEDITATION on the sufferings of our Lord should never be separated from meditation on the anguish of Mary; for it is the common opinion of the Holy Fathers that whatever Jesus suffered in His most sacred body, Mary also suffered in her holy soul. The satisfaction which we give our Lord by meditating on the sorrows of Mary is not less than that which we give Him by meditating on His own sufferings. The present consideration, therefore, shall be dedicated to the sufferings of Mary during the crucifixion of her Divine Son.

Two distinct places are venerated at Jerusalem and dedicated to the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin on Mount Calvary. One is the place where she stood while Jesus was being nailed to the cross; the other, the place where she stood while Jesus was hanging on the cross. The Evangelists speak only of the latter; but the Fathers of the Church, relying upon a constant tradition, speak of the former, which is situated on the side of Mount Calvary, where at present there is a chapel dedicated to the sufferings of Mary.

Let us first consider the sorrowful Mother as she witnesses her Son being nailed to the cross.

On account of the great multitude which assembled on Mount Calvary to behold the divine tragedy, Mary found it impossible to approach her Divine Son; but forcing her way through the crowds, she gained a position on the side of the mountain from which she was afforded a full view of the place selected for the execution. There she stood and witnessed the preparations which were being made for the crucifixion. Some of the executioners were engaged in boring holes in the cross to receive the nails which soon would pierce His sacred hands, while others chiselled a cavity in the rock in which to place the cross. When their work was completed, she saw Jesus advance and lay Himself upon His bed of death; the crowd surrounded Him and shut out her view. But at the first stroke of the hammer which was nailing Him to the cross, the power of her love revealed itself and infused into her a wonderful strength far exceeding that of nature.

The blows struck Mary's heart before their sound reached her ear; instantly she started forward, pressed through the rabble, and ascended the mountain, there to behold (sad spectacle for a tender mother) her amiable Son naked and nailed to a cross. Mary's grief on this occasion was boundless. "To what shall I compare thee? . . . For great as the sea is thy destruction: who shall heal thee?" (Lam. ii. 13.) As this holy Virgin knew that Jesus' nakedness gave Him more pain than all the tortures that the executioners could inflict, she took the veil that covered her head and, moving backwards through modesty, laid it over Him, then, turning, she carefully fixed it around His sacred body.

O desolate Mother, whither hast thou gone? Alas! we have not courage to follow thee, even in thought, to Calvary. Now, now is the time for weeping! I shall say to thee with Venerable Bartholomew of Saluzzo: "Now is the time for sorrow! Now thou art at the bottom of thy greatest anguish. Only one consolation remains to thee, O Mary, and that is a bitter one—to stay beside thy Son, to comfort Him in His agony, and then to die with Him. But no; even this is denied thee by the brutal executioners, who, impatient to raise the cross loaded with the weight of thy amiable and Divine Son, tear thee away from Him and force thee violently back among the crowd. O most afflicted Mother! to what shall I compare thee, or to what shall I liken thee, O Daughter of Jerusalem, in order to form even a faint idea of thy immense grief? Alas! only the depths of the sea can give me any conception of the depths of thy grief!

Second Point.

In order to form an idea of Mary's immense grief, it would be necessary to know the extent of her love. Now, as Mary—so St. Jerome says—loved Jesus more than He was loved by all the rest of mankind, so her grief was greater than any other imaginable grief. St. Bernard says that the greatness of the martyrs' love mitigated the anguish of their sufferings. But this was not the case with the Blessed Virgin: the more she loved, the more she was afflicted, her sufferings being proportionate to her love. Alas! how cruel must have been the martyrdom which she endured! St. Bernardine of Sienna says that if Mary's grief could have been divided among all creatures capable of entertaining it, they would all have

instantly died. In a word, her grief was as immense as was her love.

There is no holy Father, or devout contemplative, who, when considering this point of our Lord's passion, does not address Mary, and express, as best he can, his amazement at the dauntless constancy and heroic fortitude which she displayed in sorrow and tribulation. All the pain inflicted on Jesus' sacred body converged to His Mother's loving heart and became concentrated there.

The Seraphic Doctor, St. Bonaventure, considering this sorrowful mystery, is filled with tender pity and thus apostrophizes Mary: "O most pure Lady, why didst thou not remain solitary in thy humble cell? Why didst thou come out to Calvary? Alas! it was not thy habit to come out to witness such spectacles; why, therefore, did not thy natural modesty retain thee at home on this occasion? Why did not the horrors of the place, the crowds, the shouts and blasphemies of the rabble, the madness of those demons—why did these not restrain thee? Alas! I know the reason,—because thy heart was given over to grief! Thou didst not consider the presence of the rabble, the fury of the soldiers and executioners, the hatred of the scribes and Pharisees, but only the atrocity of the wounds of thy Son, the puncture of the nails, all His sufferings and His sorrows. O Lady, thy heart was wounded by the lance that pierced His side! Thou, too, wast nailed to the cross, crowned with thorns, mocked and despised; in a word, thou didst suffer in thy soul all the torments that afflicted His most sacred body. O Mary, O sweet heart of love, how thou hast become immersed in grief! I contemplate thy heart, O most dear Lady, and I can no longer recognize it for what it was! For it

is no longer a heart; it has been turned into bitterest gall!"

So speaks the Seraphic Doctor, St. Bonaventure. Let us also enter into the heart of Mary, and, on beholding all its sorrow, let us excite ourselves to sentiments of love for her who so actively co-operated in the work of our Redemption.

CONSIDERATION XLI.

Jesus is raised on the Cross: He prays for His Executioners.

"And Jesus said: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."—*St. Luke* xxiii. 34.

First Point.

SOME pious authors confound the place where Jesus was affixed to the cross with that on which the cross was placed upright. These writers think that the executioners first erected the cross and then built round it a platform upon which they raised Jesus by means of ropes, and from which they nailed Him to the cross. But this is very improbable, from the fact that it is contrary to the constant tradition of the people, and even to the practice of our Holy Mother the Church, who, in the pictures used in the devotion of the Stations of the Cross, always represents our crucified Saviour as being first nailed to the cross and afterwards elevated upon it. There are two places venerated in Jerusalem; one as the place where He was affixed to the cross, the other as the place where the cross was raised.

Having securely riveted the nails, the executioners dragged the cross to the spot on which it was to be elevated, and dropped it with a great thud into the hole made for its reception. This fall shattered and shook the Saviour's limbs and sent a thrill of excruciating pain

throughout His entire frame. Now was begun a new form of torture: suspended by three nails between heaven and earth, the wounds of His hands and feet were constantly widening, and His pain became so intense that every moment of the three hours during which He hung in that condition brought Him a cruel martyrdom. But these sufferings were light as compared with the anguish of His holy soul; indeed, His mental suffering far exceeded all the pains of crucifixion and of the most barbarous death.

The Evangelists relate that, immediately after the crucifixion, four of the soldiers who had taken an active part in the execution of the unjust sentence gathered together the garments of Jesus, and dividing them into four parts, took each a part. But for the seamless tunic which His Mother had made they cast lots, not wishing to spoil it by dividing it.

While this division was being made the people passed and repassed under the cross, insulting Jesus, wagging their heads in mockery, and vomiting forth against Him the most horrible blasphemies. This was not done by the rabble alone, but also by the chief priests, the scribes and Pharisees. All these things had been foretold by the prophet, who, speaking in the person of the suffering Saviour, said: "All they that saw Me have laughed Me to scorn: they have spoken with the lips, and wagged the head. And I am become a reproach to them: they saw Me, and they shook their heads" (Psalms xxi. 8; cviii. 25). Some cried out to Him, "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross, and we will believe in Thee." Others said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Vah, Thou that destroyest the temple of God and in three days dost rebuild it: save Thy own self." Others

again said, with bitter irony, "He hoped in the Lord; let the Lord deliver Him: let Him save Him, seeing He delighteth in Him. For if He be the true Son of God, He will defend Him, and will deliver Him from the hands of His enemies."

But what does Jesus answer to all these insults and blasphemies? Raising His languid eyes towards heaven, He prays His Eternal Father, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." O admirable prayer, truly worthy of God!

Let us first meditate on the terrible sufferings of Jesus during His agony on the cross; then we shall pass to a consideration of the sublimity of His prayer.

Second Point.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." What a difference between the legislators of earth and our most loving Redeemer! The former give forth their laws from the splendid height of a throne; the latter teaches His holy doctrine from the altar of the cross. What a difference between the written law and the law of grace! The former is proclaimed from Mount Sinai amid flashes of lightning and peals of thunder; the latter from the sacred height of the cross. Following the observation of Cardinal Bellarmine, let us notice that in this prayer Jesus does not address His Heavenly Father as God or Lord, but in order to placate His severity as Judge He appeals to Him by the tender name of Father. The excess of crime and ingratitude which was being committed had fully roused the anger of God, and Jesus could not better placate it than by making His appeal in the character of Son, as if by that loving word Father

He would say, "Father, I who am Thy Son, I who am suffering,—I freely forgive them; do Thou then, O my Father, forgive them for love of Me; for My sake forgive My executioners their sin against Thee and against Me. Remember, O My Father, that Thou art their Father also, and let Thy paternal clemency triumph over the severity of Thy justice."

"Forgive them;" that is, as Cardinal Bellarmine paraphrases these words, "Forgive them who have divided My garments amongst themselves. Forgive all who have been the cause of My bitter passion; forgive Pontius Pilate, who pronounced the unjust sentence against Me. Forgive all those who with loud voice cried out, 'Away with Him. Crucify Him, crucify Him!' Forgive the chief priests, the scribes and Pharisees, who have falsely accused Me; forgive Adam, who by his sin was the first cause of My passion, and with him forgive all his posterity."

In order that the petition might be more efficacious Jesus wished to found it upon some basis or give it some motive which would secure it favor in the Father's eyes. But as He could find no excuse for the injustice of Pilate, the cruelty of the soldiers, the envy of the priests, the folly and ingratitude of the people, the false testimony of His calumniators, He resolved to shield them all and to plead for them on the ground of their ignorance. Wherefore He said, "For they know not what they do." It is true that if the Jews had recognized Jesus as the true God, they would never have crucified Him, according to the words of St. Paul: "If they had known, they would never have crucified the God of Glory."

Having found an extenuation of their offence, He strengthens it by His omnipotent intercession, and thus

seems to plead for His tormentors: "Forgive them, Father, for the sake of that love which Thou hast cherished for Me from all eternity; forgive them through the infinite merits of My most painful passion, and through those same merits grant them true repentance, so that they may one day come to praise and bless Thee in the kingdom of heaven. If the rigors of Thy justice exact a condign satisfaction for the offences offered Thee, require it not, O My Father, at their hands, for they are not able to satisfy Thy justice; but exact it from Me, who have loaded Myself with the burden of their sins. And lo! I will offer Thee in atonement the rigors of the season in which I was born; the persecutions which I suffered while a child; the toils of the flight into Egypt; the sufferings and toils undergone in the shop of My foster-father St. Joseph; My fast of forty days; the agony in the Garden of Gethsemani; the insults I received in the house of Caiphas, the mockery and scourges which I endured in the palace of Herod and the tribunal of Pontius Pilate; the painful journey to Mount Calvary; and, finally, this My agony on the cross,—all these I offer Thee: pray, then, O Father, suspend for a while Thy wrath, and I will give Thee My very life as a holocaust. Yes; I offer Thee this humanity which I took from the virginal womb of My now most afflicted Mother,—this humanity to which the divinity is so intimately united—I offer it to Thee as a holocaust on the altar of the cross, in expiation of all the sins of the world, and for the eternal salvation of mankind."

O boundless love! O admirable prayer!—prayer worthy of a God! And it is then true, O my beloved Saviour, that Thou didst make this sublime offering of Thyself at the very moment when Thy enemies were in

the act of taking Thy life? It is thus that Thou dost avenge Thyself upon Thy enemies and executioners? What then dost Thou desire me to learn from this great lesson?

The will of our Lord is very evident. St. Bernard says, "Jesus prayed for His enemies; and shall we then fail to pray for those who detract us?" It is difficult, Bellarmine confesses, for human weakness to forgive, although, under the law of nature, it was practised by Joseph, who not only forgave his brethren who had so barbarously sold him, but also showered benefits upon their heads. It was practised under the written law by David, who patiently suffered the unjust persecutions of Saul; nay, David frequently benefited him, even exposing his life for him. Under the law of grace it was practised by St. Stephen, who prayed for his murderers, by St. James, who, on being thrown from a high tower, asked pardon for the Jews who caused his death, and by St. Paul, who, in imitation of his Divine Master, blessed those who cursed him. We, too, must practise this holy forgiveness, if we wish to be true Christians and to save our souls.

CONSIDERATION XLII.

The second Word spoken by Jesus on the Cross.

"And Jesus said to him: Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise."—*St. Luke* xxiii. 43.

First Point.

THE torture of the cross was already ignominious enough, but it did not suffice to satisfy those malignant Jews; so they hastened to crucify the two highway robbers who had been brought to Calvary along with Jesus, and placed one at His right and the other at His left, in order that He might appear the most conspicuous and be considered the most infamous of the three.

While the crowds passing and repassing under the cross ceaselessly insulted Jesus, one of the thieves joined His voice to theirs; and upon hearing the chief priests mock the Saviour because He had made Himself the Son of God, this thief adopted the same ground of insult, and said, "If Thou be the Christ, save Thyself and us."

The other robber whose name was Dismas, becoming indignant that a criminal on the point of death should so audaciously insult an innocent man similarly condemned, reproached his companion for his insolence and barbarity, saying to him: "Neither dost thou fear God, seeing that thou art under the same condemnation." This was as if he had said: "It is already an abominable thing for those walking there at the foot of the cross to insult an inno-

cent and unfortunate man. But thou, who art on the point of giving up thy soul, thou who art guilty of many crimes, and justly condemned to death—dost thou, too, dare insult an innocent man condemned to the same torture as thyself? Fearest thou not God even in these last moments of thy wicked life? Thou art at the point of death, and still thou darest to insult one who has been unjustly condemned." And then he added, "And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this Man hath done no evil" (St. Luke xxiii. 41).

Amidst the sounds of so many insults and blasphemies which resounded in Jesus' ears, sadly embittering His last moments, this voice of compassion and justice descended like balm on His soul. Wishing at once to reward the generous robber, Jesus touched his heart with divine grace; and immediately corresponding to that grace which filled him with confidence in the infinite mercy of God, Dismas turned to the Saviour, and with humility and contrition, said, "Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom."

Cardinal Bellarmine, commenting on this pathetic passage of the Gospel, observes that the good thief calls Jesus Christ Lord, and confessed Him to be true God and Redeemer, meanwhile confessing his own great unworthiness. Then the same writer passes on to examine the words, "Remember me," and he finds them full of faith, hope, love, devotion, and humility. The Cardinal observes that Dismas did not say, "if Thou canst," because he firmly believed that the Crucified whom he addressed was God, who could do as He wished. He did not say, "Remember me, if it please Thee," because his hope in the Saviour's charity was so strong that he did not doubt that his prayer would be heard. He did not say, "I wish

to enter into Thy kingdom," for his humility was too great to allow him to make such a request. Finally, he did not ask anything in particular, but only asked that he might be remembered: "Remember me," said he; and then added, "when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom," —these last words being to show the Saviour that he did not desire temporal life nor riches, but only the goods of eternity, which he then esteemed more than the life which he was about to lose. O worthy prayer! O prayer fully worthy to be imitated by us, and to be heard by God!

Let us, therefore, learn from this good thief to pray with lively faith, firm hope, and profound humility; and we may be sure that God, who heard and granted the prayer of a dying highwayman and murderer, shall infallibly hear our prayers. "Ask, and you shall receive."

Second Point.

The more careful and solicitous was the good thief in corresponding to the call of heaven, the more our merciful Redeemer was desirous of giving his reward. For, seeing that the unhappy robber's prayer was full of faith and contrition, and wishing to leave us a sublime example of His mercy in hearing our petitions at all times, even at the point of death, He again raised His voice and, consoling the good thief, said to him in loving accents: "Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise." These words were tantamount to these others: "Thy zeal in defending My innocence so unjustly attacked, hath pleased Me; thy humble confession hath been dear to Me; thy prayer, because accompanied by a lively faith and profound humility, hath been acceptable to Me,—and for all this thy sins are forgiven thee, and I

promise that this very day thou shalt be with Me in paradise. Fear not, therefore; but in thy sufferings imitate Me, offering them to My Eternal Father, and in a few hours thou shalt enter upon an eternity of bliss."

Cardinal Bellarmine further observes that Jesus Christ did not say to the good thief, "I will place you on My right hand, among the just, on the Day of Judgment;" He did not say, "I will admit you into My kingdom after a few years of purgatory;" He did not say, "I will console you after a few months or days,"—but He said, "This very day, before the setting of the sun, thou shalt ascend from the sufferings of the gibbet into the delights of heaven."

Admirable goodness of Jesus! Incomparably happy fate of the repentant sinner! Our Lord, being at that moment immersed in a sea of suffering and anguish, compassed by the sorrows of death, could have refused to hear the prayer of the good thief; but He preferred rather to forget the intensity of His sufferings than the immensity of His mercy. Jesus, who remained deaf, as it were, to the horrible blasphemies of His cruel executioners, and the insults of the priests, hearkens to the voice of the penitent thief. A simple prayer was sufficient to induce Him to hear, accept, and reward the repentant sinner.

"The good Jesus," says St. Bernard, "does not allow Himself to be outdone in generosity; as soon as He hears, He promises and rewards. Who could despair, having such a Master?" St. Ambrose observes that the grant was greater than the request, our Lord always being accustomed to bestow more than is asked of Him. The thief asked only to be remembered, but Jesus promised that he should soon be in paradise. The same holy Doc-

tor also says that the Saviour, before consoling His Blessed Mother, addresses and consoles the thief, because He wished to show that He ever attached a prior importance to the chief end for which He had come into the world, the salvation of sinners.

Many are the lessons which the sacred expositors deduce from this second word of Jesus on the cross. Among them, these two are most profitable: first, that even great sinners should still have confidence in the Saviour's mercy; secondly, that even the just should work out their salvation in tear and trembling.

Sinners should have great confidence in God when they behold a murderer who had lead a life of dissipation and crime, till overtaken by justice and condemned to capital punishment, at last becoming a convert and saint. The just, on the other hand, should learn a lesson of holy fear, when they see that, in the very hour in which human redemption was being accomplished, of the two companions of our Lord, one was saved and the other was damned. "One," St. Jerome says, "went to heaven;" and the other followed Judas. St. Augustine says that the cross seemed like a tribunal, the judge in the midst, the guilty, one on the right, and the other on the left: the one who repented was saved, and the one who remained obdurate was damned. "This," adds the holy Doctor, "was an expressive image of what was to take place on the Day of Judgment, when many will be placed on the right and many on the left."

There may here be added another reflection suggested by a tradition still existing in Palestine. The people of that country point out, even at the present day, a castle known as the "Castle of the Good Thief." It is situated between Ramle and Jerusalem; and here, as the tradition

goes, Dismas used to lie in wait for travellers going to and from Jerusalem. On one occasion the Blessed Virgin happened to pass that way, and the robber not only respected her but also gave her an escort to defend and protect her on her journey. This act of courtesy on the part of a highwayman was most pleasing to the Blessed Virgin and her Divine Son. The robber's reward was heaven. Let us, therefore, ever be devout to this Holy Virgin to whom the Church gives the glorious title of "Refuge of Sinners." Her protection shall surely not fail us, since it did not fail a robber and murderer.

CONSIDERATION XLIII.

The Third and Fourth Words spoken by Jesus on the Cross.

"When Jesus, therefore, had seen His mother and the disciple standing, whom He loved, He saith to His mother: Woman, behold thy son. After that, He saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother."—*St. John* xix. 26, 27.

First Point.

HAVING prayed for His executioners and promised the good thief the kingdom of heaven, Jesus saw that only a few hours remained to Him; and wishing to follow the ordinary custom of the dying, He disposed Himself to make His last will from the hard wood of the cross. Like a tender father who, stretched upon his death-bed, gathers his children around him to express his last wishes to them, our most amiable Jesus, looking down from the cross upon His afflicted Mother standing with St. John, addressed His third word to those two privileged creatures,—a word always full of tenderest consolation for us.

Turning His dying eyes upon Mary and St. John, the beloved disciple, Jesus said, "Woman, behold thy son;" then turning towards St. John, He added, "Behold thy mother." It was as if He had said: "The hour hath at length arrived when I must return to My Eternal Father. Seeing that thou, O Mary, hast no longer father nor

mother, brothers nor sisters, to support thee in thy sorrow and comfort thee in this vale of tears, I will not leave thee alone and destitute of every consolation, but I commend thee to John, My beloved disciple, who shall be to thee as a son; and him I warmly commend to thee, that thou mayest be unto him a mother."

The Gospel says that "from that hour the disciple took her to his own." The holy Fathers add that neither Mary nor John was able to make any answer, both signifying their assent to the disposition made by the Saviour by a simple inclination of the head.

Now, if we wish to derive spiritual profit from the consideration of this third word of Jesus on the cross, let us imagine that we, too, are standing near Him on Mount Calvary, and that, in dying accents, He thus addresses us:

"Behold, My dear children, in a few moments I shall be no more. You are those whom I have made My heirs: hear, therefore, My last will in your regard. I do not, indeed, bequeath you immense treasures, vast possessions, rich household goods, because, My kingdom not being of this world, I have never possessed such things. You well know that I was born in a stable between two animals, without covering or shelter; and that I have lived on the bread of charity, and passed long days in fasting, because I had nothing to eat. Yet I will not pass from this world without leaving you a token of My love. While with you, I have always done you good, giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, the use of their limbs to the lame, health to the sick, life to the dead, liberty from Satan to the possessed, and miraculous food to the hungry. And on the very night that I was betrayed into the hands of My bitter enemies, My desire to remain forever with you was so

great that I instituted, by the miracle of miracles, the Most August Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

"Soon after this admirable institution, I was made prisoner, loaded with chains, led before tribunals, where insults and injuries were heaped upon Me. I was scourged, crowned with thorns, and brought to this mount as a malefactor. Here I was given gall, stripped of My garments, and nailed to this cross between two thieves. And now tortured, full of anguish, covered with wounds, and on the point of rendering up My soul to My Eternal Father, I think it proper to make My last will. But I have nothing to bequeath you, not even My garments; still I wish to leave you a token of My love: so, dear children, I give you the most precious object that I have on earth,—My amiable Mother; and I leave her to you that you may know how deep is My love for you. Be watchful and tender to My dear Mother, and in your necessities of soul and body have recourse to her with confidence, and she will certainly help you. In time of danger and distress, affliction and infirmity, temptation and despondency, she will come to your assistance, for she is the treasurer of My graces, the dispenser of My favors, the gate of heaven, the refuge of sinners, the counsellor of the afflicted. Go, therefore, always to My Mother with firm confidence and hope, and you shall ever find in her the tenderest of mothers. But thou, O John, console her in her grief; bear her company, and try henceforth to assuage the sorrows of her life. And thou, O Mary, accept for thy children all the children of the human race; and when they have recourse to thee, look not upon them as sinners, but with a mother's eye of tenderest pity. For them I have lived a life of privation and suffering; for them I now shed My blood, and

for them in a few moments I will deliver up My life on the cross. See to it, dear Mother, that all My sufferings and anguish shall not remain without fruits, and by thy powerful intercession procure the salvation of all men."

O admirable and adorable will! O loving words of my Saviour! And is it, then, true that I am a child of Mary? Therefore, with all confidence will I ever have recourse to her. Ah, my most amiable Saviour, what a treasure hast Thou bequeathed me! And thou, O Mary, my dearest Mother! since thou didst not refuse to accept me for thy son, obtain for me the graces necessary to make me worthy to call thee by the sweet name of Mother.

Second Point.

Imagining ourselves still on Calvary, let us contemplate our beloved Redeemer, who, having bequeathed us His most afflicted Mother, turns to His Eternal Father and utters His fourth word from the cross.

But first let us consider the state of anguish in which our Lord was when He thus turned to heaven for help. If He rested His body on His feet, the punctures of the nails became wider and wider; if He sustained His weight by His outstretched arms, the wounds in His hands were widened; if He leaned His head against the cross, the thorns penetrated more deeply; if He looked down, it was only to experience renewed anguish at the sight of His grief-stricken Mother. His veins were being emptied of their blood; His body was reduced to the utmost; His breathing began to fail; He no longer received from the Eternal Father those celestial consolations which had hitherto supported Him in the course of His bitter passion; all His disciples, except the beloved

St. John, had abandoned Him; and the Jews at the foot of the cross were wagging their heads and calling Him a seducer and a blasphemer of the name of God.

Abandoned thus in His agony, Jesus fulfilled the words spoken of Him by Ecclesiasticus, "They compassed Me on every side, and there was no one that would help Me. I looked for the succor of men, and there was none." Finding no succor from creatures, Jesus turns His eyes towards heaven, and from the bottom of His afflicted heart exclaims, "Eli, Eli, lamma sabacthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Few words, indeed; but oh, how much they contain! It was as if Jesus had said: "I am Thy only begotten Son; I am Thy beloved from all eternity; I have been obedient to Thee even unto death,—and desertest Thou Me in the midst of this ocean of suffering? Alas! have pity on Me, O most clement Father, and save Me. The waters of tribulation have penetrated in unto My soul; I have fallen into a bottomless abyss of woe; I am as one cast out upon the waters of the deep, and the tempest has overwhelmed Me; I have become a stranger to My brethren, and unknown unto the children of My Mother, and now dost Thou, too, O my Father, abandon Me?"

How deeply painful this sense of abandonment must have been, we may conjecture from the fact that the Saviour's utterance was accompanied by a tone of complaint—the first in the course of the passion. When falsely accused, when cruelly scourged, when condemned, when nailed to the cross, Jesus was patient and resigned; not a groan had escaped from His lips; it seemed that He had lost all sensibility. But when He saw Himself abandoned by all, and even by His Eternal Father, then

from out the bitterness of His afflicted soul escaped the cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

The intensity of this grief can only be imagined by those privileged souls who were once nourished with spiritual favors and are afterwards, as a trial to their virtue, abandoned to spiritual dryness. While such souls enjoy heavenly consolations, they are firm under every kind of suffering,—persecutions, sickness, poverty, loss of friends; they could give up even their very lives for the sake of their sweet Jesus. But the moment that God withdraws those spiritual comforts, they at once become sad, gloomy, and discouraged, and complain of be-being forsaken by their Divine Master. Such persons should think of Jesus abandoned on the cross, and finding this abandonment the most cruel of His many sufferings. Meanwhile, His enemies, far from being touched by His cry to the Eternal Father, took occasion to deride the more, saying, "This Man calleth Elias: let be, let us see whether Elias will come to deliver Him."

We should not imitate the example of the perfidious Jews, but we should reflect with Blessed Simon of Cassia that Jesus was abandoned by His Eternal Father, that we might not be abandoned to the power of our enemies, and that His abandonment might prove the source of our salvation. Let us, therefore, pray with St. Bernard: "At my last hour, O Lord, let me not be abandoned into the hands of my enemies; but do Thou help me, that I may render up my soul into Thy most loving arms."

CONSIDERATION XLIV.

The Last Word spoken by Jesus on the Cross.

"Afterwards Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said: I thirst."—*St. John* xix. 28.

First Point.

THE quantity of blood which had flowed from our Divine Lord during the scourging, the crowning with thorns, and the crucifixion was so great that it caused Him a burning thirst. In order to obtain something to allay it, and also to show us that there was no kind of torment possible to one in His situation which He did not endure, He exclaimed, "I thirst." Cardinal Bellarmine thus paraphrases those words: "All the humors of My body are dried up; My throat, My palate, and My very bowels are parched. If there are any on this mount who have any sentiment of compassion for Me, let them procure Me, in charity, a drop of water to cool My burning thirst." This is the literal sense of the words, "I thirst;" but our Lord had another thirst, and one far more ardent than that which consumed His body. It was that thirst which He made known to the Samaritan woman at Sichem,—an undying thirst for the salvation of souls. Hence a devout author, in the fervor of his meditation, exclaims: "For what, Lord, dost Thou thirst? Doth Thy thirst then torment Thee more than Thy cross? Thou art silent concerning the torment of Thy cross, but

Thou speakest of the torment of Thy thirst." St. Augustine answers, in the person of Christ, "My thirst is for your eternal salvation; the thirst which I have for your soul is greater than the thirst which consumes My body." St. Laurence Justinian says that the thirst of Jesus was for still greater suffering, as if He would have said: "If you think that I have not already suffered sufficiently, add to My sufferings; add scourging to scourging, wounds to wounds, tortures to tortures: I accept them all, I desire them, I thirst for them, and for even greater sufferings still."

The Jews heard the Saviour's request, but instead of feeling compassion for Him, they were prompted to a new act of barbarity. A vase filled with vinegar stood by into which one of them dipped a sponge, and placing it on the end of a spear, offered it to Jesus. "Now there was a vessel set there full of vinegar. And they putting a sponge full of vinegar about hyssop, put it to His mouth" (St. John xix. 29). The Seraphic Doctor, St. Bonaventure, commenting on these words, says: "The Jews not knowing of any other external torture which they could inflict on Jesus, invented this new barbarity to afflict Him internally." St. Laurence Justinian says that it was a thing unheard of even in the most barbarous countries, to give vinegar as a drink to a dying man. This cruelty was an excess of inhumanity without parallel. What is not denied to the lowest animals when dying is refused to the expiring Son of God. St. Bonaventure finds a reason for this act of cruelty: Jesus had suffered through the sense of hearing by the blasphemies poured out against Him; in His eyes, by His tears; in His sense of touch, by the wounds He had received: there yet remained one sense through which He should

suffer,—the sense of taste, in order to atone for the sin of Adam and Eve in eating the forbidden fruit, and for all the sins of gluttony of the human race.

Jesus did not refuse to allow the draught to be pressed to His lips; but no sooner had He tasted it than He spoke for the sixth time, saying, "It is consummated." Bellarmine paraphrases these words as follows: "The great sacrifice is consummated, of which the sacrifices of the Old Law were only shadows and figures. The will of My Eternal Father is now accomplished." "All is consummated," says Blessed Simon, "all the days of His life on this ungrateful earth are over. The war against sin and hell is finished; the Redemption of mankind is accomplished. Jesus has fully paid the debts of divine justice; He has drunk to the last drop the bitter draught in His chalice of suffering; the prophecies have been fulfilled; the figures of the Old Testament have disappeared, and only the death of the testator is needed that His testament may be executed. But if everything is finished, why does not sin cease on the earth." Behold, what should be the fruit of this consideration!

Second Point.

Now that all things had been accomplished, Jesus turned His dying eyes once more towards heaven and exclaimed, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." That is to say, "Father, My most amiable Father, I commend My soul to Thy paternal love; sustain Me in this terrible passage; accept the victim which Thy Son offereth Thee in atonement for the sins of the world. This soul of Mine, O My Father, oppressed by so many sufferings, overwhelmed by so much anguish, I return

into the hands of Thy infinite mercy. Let Me then expire in Thy most loving arms."

These were Jesus' last words, and when He had spoken them, He expired. "And bowing His head, He gave up the ghost."

The earth at once began to tremble, the sun was darkened, the rocks burst asunder, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top even to the bottom, the graves opened and many of the dead appeared to people in Jerusalem. But while these wonders were taking place in the realm of nature, even greater were being accomplished in the realm of grace. Infidels believed; obstinate sinners repented; the Gentiles and many of the multitude who had cried out, "Let Him be crucified," and who only a few moments before had insulted Him as He hung upon the cross, struck their breasts, saying, "This Man was truly the Son of God."

St. Jerome, writing from the cave of Bethlehem, exclaims: "Ah! sinners, what do I see? All insensible creatures give, in their own way, signs of sorrow for the death of the Creator. The sun is darkened, the earth quakes, the rocks are burst asunder, the veil of the temple is rent in twain, the sepulchres yield up their dead, and man only, for whom Jesus died, refuses to grieve."

St. Ephraim cries out, "All creatures are seized with great terror, and shall we sinners remain unmoved?" St. Thomas says that the rocks were rent to signify that the hearts of men, even the hardest, shall one day be rent at the remembrance of the sufferings of Jesus. St. Bernard, filled with the greatest sorrow, turns to our Saviour, and thus addresses Him: "O my good Jesus, what do I see? We should have died, and Thou diest instead! We sinned and Thou it is that offerest the atonement. O work with-

out example! O grace without limit! O charity without measure!"—"O sinners," concludes St. Ephraim, "tremble as you consider these things. Jesus Christ died, and died on the cross for us. Great God, Thou didst then die a victim of Thy immense love for us! What shall we do now that we are deprived of so amiable a Father? To whom shall we have recourse in our troubles, in our necessities? Who shall now defend us in our dangers, temptations? Who shall come to the aid of our weakness? Who shall calm our perplexities, our anxieties, if Thou wilt leave us? Alas! we have deserved to be abandoned by Thee. We persecuted Thee even unto death; our bad thoughts crowned Thee with thorns, our disorderly passions embittered Thy mind; yes, we are the ones who crucified Thee by the multitude of our sins. Leave, then, this ungrateful earth which gave Thee in return for all Thy love only scourges, thorns, and finally the cross. But, oh! when Thou shalt have entered Thy kingdom, do not forget us. Remember that Thy first prayer from the altar of the cross was for Thy executioners: as then Thou didst pray for us miserable sinners, so grant us life everlasting through the infinite merits of Thy most bitter passion and death.

CONSIDERATION XLV.

Jesus is taken down from the Cross and laid in the Sepulchre.

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene."—*St. John* xix. 25.

First Point.

THE most horrible crime capable of being conceived even by the powers of a supernatural being had now been fully consummated, and the only begotten Son of God hung lifeless on the cross. Then only did those barbarous men who had impassively witnessed the divine tragedy begin to descend Golgotha, and soon the heights of that sacred mountain were almost deserted. Mary, however, remained immovable at the foot of the cross, her eyes tenderly fixed upon the Crucified; and with her were John, the beloved disciple, and Mary Magdalene and Mary of Cleophas, these two women having witnessed the crucixion from afar, and ascended the mountain when the crowds had deserted it. Soon came certain soldiers who had been sent by Pontius Pilate at the request of the Jews to break the legs of the crucified, and to take their bodies down from the cross, in order that they might not remain exposed on the great Jewish feast of

the parasceve. These soldiers accordingly approached and fulfilled their office by breaking the legs of the two thieves who were still in agony. Finding Jesus already dead, they did not break His legs; but a soldier, wishing to vent his ferocity even against the Saviour's corpse, struck His sacred side with a lance, and immediately from this new wound flowed forth blood and water. Their work done, the soldiers went their way, leaving to others the care of removing and burying the bodies of the executed.

Then Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two secret disciples of Jesus, arrived on the sacred scene. Having courageously presented themselves before Pontius Pilate, and obtained permission to take possession of the dead body of their Master, they had now come to pay those sacred remains the last sad offices of religion, carrying with them a mixture of myrrh and aloes—"about an hundred pound weight," says St. John—in order to embalm the venerable body; they also brought with them linen cloths in which to envelop it, according to the custom of the Jews in burying the dead.

The first act of these disciples was to offer consolation to the afflicted Virgin Mother. They then proceeded to the deposition of the sacred body of their Divine Master. Placing two small ladders against the cross, they ascended, and, taking a folded sheet, passed it under the arms and then secured it to the cross so that the weight of the body might be supported on its descent. They first released the hands, which fell cold and limp by the Saviour's side. As each nail was extracted it was handed to St. John, and he in turn gave it to Mary, who fervently kissed it and carefully kept it. The hands being detached, they unnailed the feet and let the body slowly,

slowly glide down the sheet, thus accomplishing the descent from the cross.

The disciples tenderly laid the sacred remains in the arms of the trembling, grief-stricken Mother. What a difference from the first time that she had received and held Him on her knee as a child! Then He was all beauty, and now His wounded and blood-stained body inspires horror. Unhappy Mother, wast thou not satisfied with having witnessed His scourging, with having gone to meet Him on the Dolorous Way, with having accompanied Him to Mount Calvary, and with having witnessed His painful crucifixion and death? Dost thou now wish to receive His dead body into thy loving arms? O truly great soul of Mary, worthy only of the Mother of God! Behold, O Mary, all thy desires are satisfied! Thou dost again possess thy treasure, and thou canst freely give vent to thy maternal love. But, alas! she can no longer feel the throbbings of His heart. She no longer sees His eyes beaming love upon her. She contemplates that loving countenance which was once the delight of heaven and earth, but which is now all wounded and disfigured. Those divine lips which were wont to pronounce words of eternal life, are now silent and motionless. That adorable head which had, in His infancy, so often reposed upon her breast, is now transfixed by sharpest thorns. Those omnipotent hands which had built heaven and earth, and performed stupendous miracles, are now torn by cruel nails. Those feet which ever hastened to aid suffering humanity are horribly disfigured by the punctures of the nails. The sacred side, the seat of His most loving heart, from which have sprung so many tender affections, is now open from the wound of a lance, and blood and

water still trickle from it. Those sacred limbs which, in infancy, she had so often caressed, are all covered with wounds. His soul no longer gives light to the sacred humanity which was its companion in suffering, and now, worn out by torments and tortures, the sacred body demands the repose and silence of the tomb.

But, O most Holy Virgin, before thy Son is taken from thy view, accomplish for Him those last sad offices of charity which thy maternal grief so eagerly suggests. Remove the crown of thorns from His sacred head,—that crown which caused Him so much pain; wipe from His form the blood which flowed so copiously from His wounds; remove from His face the revolting spittle, by which He was so much dishonored; anoint Him with odoriferous balm and spices in order to preserve His body from corruption; wrap Him in a clean linen garment; then, with John the beloved disciple, with Mary Magdalene, pious Nicodemus, and faithful Joseph of Arimathea, go and deposit those sacred mortal remains in the adjacent sepulchre which Joseph freely gives to his Divine Master.

Second Point.

At last Jesus is laid in the sepulchre, and the great stone rolled over against it. The sun has gone down, and the soldiers have arrived, who were sent by Pilate, at the request of the Jews, to guard the tomb, lest the disciples steal away the Saviour's body and spread the news of His resurrection. Thou, O Mary, canst no longer stay in this place; for the night is fast advancing, and the guards who have taken up their position on the mount will force thee to retire. Deposit, therefore, thy immaculate heart

in the tomb with thy Beloved. As a dove to its cote, return, O Mary, to thy desolate home, there to deplore thy irreparable loss. The blood which Jesus shed on the way to Calvary will serve to guide thee back to Jerusalem; the faithful disciples who helped thee to take Jesus down from the cross and to bury Him will, in mournful and reverend silence, accompany thee; the other Marys will sustain thee; the beloved disciple will follow thee, weeping bitter tears. But before quitting this sacred tomb, which in all future time shall be visited and reverenced by multitudes of people from all nations of the earth, turn once more and look upon the mount where the divine tragedy was enacted. Contemplate the hard tree of the cross, on which thy Son offered up the grand and truly sublime holocaust; lift up that crown and those nails, the instruments of His painful passion; take up with a sponge as much as possible of the blood of Jesus which reddens the heights of Calvary, and then, O most afflicted of mothers, retrace thy steps over the road so recently trodden by thy beloved Son bearing the terrible weight of the cross. On thy return home thou shalt see the apostles who deserted their Master in His last hours, and who, now confused and repentant, shall come to prostrate themselves at thy feet to obtain thy gracious pardon. Thou shalt meet the penitent Peter, humbled, shedding torrents of tears, and speechless from the intensity of the grief which oppresses him. Finally, thou shalt see all sinners, who, conscious of having become thy adopted children by the last will of Jesus, shall take refuge under thy protection, and implore thy maternal clemency. Amongst those sinners, O Mary, thou shalt see me,—ungrateful and criminal as I am—coming with contrite and

humble heart to crave thy clemency and to pray thee as I pray thee now:

O most sorrowful Mother, what confusion overwhelms me as I contemplate thee standing at the foot of the cross! Who can understand the excessive grief which filled thy heart when thou receivedst into thy arms the beloved form of thy dead Son? No; not even a mother's heart save thy own is able to conceive it. But what except our sins was the cause of thy great sorrow? Recognizing that I am guilty of many crimes, I confess that I helped to pierce thy tender heart with a sharp sword of grief. By my frequent relapses into sin I aided in torturing the sacred humanity of Jesus. By showing myself merciless to others, I caused His precious blood to flow. My obscene words were the thorns in that horrible crown; my acts of dishonesty nailed Him to the cross; my gluttony, immodest looks, and disorderly conduct covered His face with disgusting spittle and pierced His sacred side. But remember, O my merciful Mother, that all His wounds are so many mouths which plead for my pardon. Remember His last words to thee, "Woman, behold thy son." Chosen to be the Mother of all sinners, thou didst accept me as thy son. Thou who didst always imitate the virtues of Jesus, forget not the last instance of His love for man. He was in His agony, nailed to His cross between two thieves, immersed in a sea of suffering, and about to render up His soul to God. Seeing that His enemies ceased not to insult, mock, and torture Him, He prayed His Eternal Father to forgive them. Imitate Him, O Mary, in this heroic act of charity, as thou didst imitate His other sublime virtues. Spread over me thy protecting mantle.

Hide the multitude of my sins from the sight of thy Divine Son. Obtain for me the grace to live and die in the meditation of His most holy passion; for if I keep constantly before my mind all that Jesus suffered for me, I shall be enabled to avoid evermore offending Him, and I shall thus obtain the salvation of my soul,—for which I most sincerely hope, through thy holy intercession and the infinite merits of my Redeemer.

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